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No. 23

BEADLE'S FRONTIER SERIES.

SLASHAWAY THE FEARLESS



(Printed in the United States of America).

Slashaway, the Fearless

OR,

The Hermit of Spectre Isle

BY

J. MILTON HOFFMAN

Author of "The Fearless Ranger," "Button Hole Jack," "Cam
amity Joe," "Mournful Mose," "Gunpowder Jim," etc., etc.)

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Slashaway, the Fearless.

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CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG MAN FROM NEW YORK.

"AN odd chap, you are, and no mistake. What is your name?"

"Slashaway, the Fearless. Sometimes they call me Saul."

"They? Who?"

"The redskins—the palefaces—everybody. Saul Slashaway. Is thar anythin' wrong about the name?"

"I believe not."

But as the young man said this, he shuddered, an ashy paleness overspread his face, and he took a step backward, while his hot breath panted the stranger's name.

"Retreating, are you?" exclaimed Slashaway, with a hoarse, mad laugh. "A fine way to break company with a friend. Suppose you come back."

An influence such as he had never before experienced prompted the young man to retrace his steps.

"Well, what can I do for you now?" he asked,

trying to appear unconcerned. "Do you want me to tell you who I am?"

The angry look went out of the old man's eyes, and bringing his rifle to the ground, he answered quickly:

"I do; I'd give the world to know your history, for it must be mighty strange—mighty strange. Where do you live? Who are you? What is your name?"

The old man took a step forward. His eyes began to grow in size, and an ugly expression, amounting almost to ferocity, gathered around his mouth.

The young man trembled.

"What do you want?" he said, in a voice anything but steady. "Shall I tell you my name?"

"Yes, your name, your name."

"My name is Hale—Edward Hale," was the quick reply. "Anything more?"

"How came you on the plains? You wasn't born here—not here, at least. I reckon not. You don't look much like a hunter—a cussed sight too green. A city swell, ain't ye?"

The young man answered without hesitation. He was gaining in confidence.

"I have always lived in the city," he said, "and am now having my first experience on the plains. I am an artist by occupation, and drifted westward in the interest of my trade."

"But how came you here, right here, and alone?"

The old hunter's eyes were looking the young man through and through.

"Let me explain," said the latter, in as firm a voice as he could command. "I reached the settlement fifty miles or so east of here about five days ago. I stayed there three days. Then I fell in with a man who called himself Jasper Ellis. He was a trapper, he said, and lived up here somewhere—lived in a cave. He persuaded me to accompany him home, and we started. We were both well mounted. My companion was very agreeable. I suspicioned nothing.

"Well, nothing went amiss until about four hours

ago, when some six or eight horrible looking men, bandits, I should say, suddenly swept down upon us, and before I could hardly realize it, my horse was taken away from me, my watch and money stolen, and the outlaws were gone. What became of my companion? The robbers carried him off, of course. I didn't know it then, but I know it now—he was one of them, the biggest rascal of the crowd."

"And he called himself what?" questioned Slashaway, half sneeringly.

"Jasper Ellis," was the quick reply, "but the outlaws called him Sandy Jim."

Slashaway, the Fearless, broke into a bitter laugh.

"Sandy Jim," he repeated, like a man handling something carefully. "Sandy Jim, the man with only one eye. Everybody meets him now-a-days—everybody but me; and what wouldn't I give to meet him face to face. It's mighty strange he never stops me on the road. Has he read my thoughts? Is he afraid of me? Sandy Jim, the outlaw. May the curses of Saul Slashaway be upon him!"

The hunter shouldered his rifle, and, muttering to himself, moved slowly away. Suddenly he stopped, turned, and beckoned young Edward Hale to his side. A moment he glanced savagely around him, then he gathered his breath, and hissed like an adder:

"You do not know Sandy Jim; I do; that is the difference. Sandy Jim is a murderer, almost a devil. Should you meet him again, shoot him down; trample on him as you would trample a snake; cut his heart out; kill him by inches, foul, miserable devil that he is. Let me tell you something. If you do not kill Sandy Jim, *I'll kill you.*"

"Heavens! you do not mean it."

Slashaway, the Fearless, laughed the laugh of a maniac—it was almost a shriek.

His eyes glittered as he continued:

"You must kill Sandy Jim, or die yourself. Here, this rifle, take it, and do your work. I meant to shoot you when I first saw you, but you've seen Sandy Jim,

will see him again, and will shoot him down; therefore I save your life. Here, this rifle, take it, and be off."

Mechanically, Edward Hale took the rifle from the hunter's hand. He said nothing, he did not move.

"Why don't ye leave?" cried Slashaway, fiercely. "Begone, I say."

"I'll go at once."

And he started, and the hunter watched him until he was out of sight.

He was a tall, slim young man—this Edward Hale—twenty-five years of age, well-educated, an artist by profession, and, at the time we write, was having, as he had informed the hunter, his first experience on the plains.

"I don't know much about hunting," he had said to Sandy Jim when the latter offered him the hospitality of his home. "I can load a gun, I guess, and that's about all. I know nothing of a hunter's life."

"But I'll show you a trick or two if you'll come with me," said Sandy Jim, by way of encouragement. "As sure as I'm a-livin', I'll astonish you."

As young Edward Hale found himself some time afterwards alone on the prairie, the words of Sandy Jim came to him, and he thought with a sigh, that he had been astonished in more ways than one.

"I am at a loss to know what to do," he said, a minute or so after his adventure with Slashaway, the Fearless. "My situation is anything but enviable. I am alone on the prairie, hundreds of miles from home, unacquainted with my surroundings, no friends, no food, nothing. Sandy Jim! so I am commissioned to shoot him, am I? Well, we shall see, we shall see."

He looked back of him to satisfy himself that Slashaway, the Fearless, was no longer in sight, then, turning, directed his steps toward a belt of timber to the westward nearly a mile away.

"I must get back to the settlement, if possible," he began, as he journeyed along, "and in the meantime,

handle this rifle the best I know how. One thing in particular, I must look to. I must avoid Saul Slashaway. It won't do to meet the crazy old man a second time. He's a dangerous person—this Saul Slashaway—a very dangerous man. Sandy Jim, the rascal, told me about him, said he was crazy, mad, a perfect fiend. At the settlement everybody said: 'Look out for Slashaway, the Fearless, he is mad.' Strange that the old man should want me to kill Sandy Jim. Will I do it? I think not, I am not a murderer!"

As the last word escaped the young man's lips, he stopped and looked back of him, for he thought he heard his own name linked with the word murderer, and repeated close to his ear.

At first he was frightened, could not utter a word, turned pale, trembled, and stood like a man in a dream.

"I thought I was alone," at last, he whispered, "but I am not. Some one is following me—some one who knows my name. Who can it be? Slashaway, or Sandy Jim? Nonsense, it was but the wind I heard, I am frightened. I am nervous. Everything startles me. I will go on."

He continued to advance, reached the timber after a five minutes walk, and halting under the branches of a stunted oak, remarked aloud:

"Only a clump of trees; I thought it was a wood of some extent, or at least a stretch of timber. I am disappointed. However, I shall not complain, but do the best I can. If I am not mistaken, this timber borders a lake or river of some kind. I think I can see water through the trees. A little nearer and I can tell."

He stepped off briskly in the direction of the water, and had gone about a rod, when a circumstance occurred which, for the time being, transformed him into a block of marble.

A woman's voice was heard singing in the chorus of a long-forgotten song. The voice was soft, sweet, melodious, plaintive at times, then harsh almost to un-

SLASHAWAY, THE FEARLESS.

pleasantness, and again, rising up and outward in a beautiful undulating wave of melody.

For a time it seemed to Edward Hale that he was listening to an angel's voice, or that he was dreaming, for he could not make himself believe that the plaintive notes borne to him on the summer wind were connected in any way with flesh and blood.

"There are women who sing as sweet, probably," he said, at last, "but what woman would live in this out-of-the-way place, and living here, what woman would sing? Strange, that I should be so deceived. My imagination is running away with me. I hear nothing but the wind, I am a coward."

To keep his spirits up he began to whistle and tramp around among the trees; but the more he whistled and walked, the plainer the voice of the woman, singing so sweetly, singing so softly, sounded in his ears.

Edward Hale was not a coward; he was only a little superstitious, or rather a believer in the Wonderful, and in this case all his superstitious feelings were aroused, and, without knowing it, he began to move slowly out of the timber toward the prairie, leaving the sweet song-bird behind.

Reaching the edge of the wood he halted, and began to look around him and listen, thinking, perhaps, he might see something, or, at least, catch a few notes of the song warbled so sweetly by the woman of his fancy.

But the voice of the singer could not be heard; it had died softly away on the summer wind, and, for the time being, Edward Hale heard it no more.

In vain he listened, in vain he skirted the timber, approaching nearer and nearer the water which he had associated with the unseen musician; but the song-bird had flown.

In a melancholy mood he halted at last by a clump of bushes near the edge of the timber, and, seating himself on the ground, began to muse aloud.

"Can it be possible," he whispered, "that I heard

nothing that I have been dreaming? How strange I feel; how my heart beats, flutters, pauses. I wonder what is the matter with me. I almost wish I had gone on with Sandy Jim. Maybe he would have murdered me; he probably would, the blood-thirsty rascal! Anyway, I had better be dead than be here—almost."

He stopped speaking suddenly, for at this moment a rabbit bounded across his path, and halting a short distance from him, turned and looked at him in a manner, as he thought, quite saucily.

"Inipadent thing," cried the young man, "to stop so near me; doubtless knows I never fired a gun in my life. A good time to begin, right here. Just like all the rest, don't fear me in the least; stands perfectly still, quietly watching me. We shall see, we shall see."

He raised his rifle to his shoulder, took aim as best he could, and fired.

As soon as he had fired he rushed to the spot, but no rabbit was there, alive or dead; he had missed the mark almost by a rod.

"It all comes by practice," he muttered, as he retraced his steps. "I'll try again, the next opportunity."

The next opportunity came about five minutes afterward, in the shape of a huge buzzard, who settled himself on a rock a short distance away, and, all unsuspecting, began to clean his bill.

"I'll fix your apple-dumplings for you, old buzzard," remarked the young man, jocosely, as he brought his rifle to his shoulder. "Prepare to die."

A loud report, keen and startling, rang out upon the air, a blue wave of smoke curled up from the wood, and Edward Hale, instead of seeing the object of his aim fall lifeless to the ground, on the contrary, saw it rise from the rock, and sail quietly away.

"A fine artist, I am, with a gun," grunted young Hale, half sneeringly. "I couldn't shoot Sandy Jim if I wanted to. Saul Slashaway commissioned the

wrong man to do his work when he commissioned me. But I may get up to it. There is nothing like trying. Hark ! what did I hear then ? Some one is following me. Listen !"

He halted, and turning his ear to the ground, listened intently.

But what he thought he heard a bitter laugh or snarl—was not repeated. All was still ; he could see nothing, hear nothing, but the thumping of his own heart.

"Surely I heard a laugh," he said, as he went on, looking around him. "It was more like a sneer than a laugh, though a little of both. I wonder if I can again be dreaming. Nonsense ; I am a nervous wight. I heard nothing."

He began to whistle softly to himself, while his eyes roved over the prairie ; his ears caught at every sound that fell, and he appeared, for the time being, like a man who had much to fear, and sadly in need of a friendly hand to help him through.

Halting at last under the branches of a spreading oak, he directed his eyes to a point in the prairie's deep expanse, and fixedly looked for several minutes, when he quietly dropped to the ground, and exclaimed :

"A band of redskins as sure as I am living. In all I count just twenty-seven. I wonder if they are on the war-path. I think I had better keep dark. I'm not acquainted with the red chaps very much, but what I know of them, I don't like them. Oh, they are coming this way. Now I can take observations."

Hidden from view by a clump of bushes through which he himself could see quite plainly, our young friend watched and waited, fully determined to see what there was to be seen, when the redskins passed him by.

In single file the Indian horde approached the wood, then turning, passed within a hundred yards of Edward Hale, and continued their silent march over the prairie.

"Ugly, scowling devils," whispered the young man, as soon as they were out of sight. "Good for me that I did not show myself. The rascals have been up to their old tricks—murdering emigrants. If my eyes did not deceive me, I saw three captives in the crowd—two men and a girl, or rather, woman. I wonder what they will do with them—the captives. Burn them at the stake, I reckon. Too bad, too bad."

With no particular purpose in view, young Hale shouldered his rifle, and without knowing it, started off in the direction of the water, out of which and over which had come the voice of the woman singing the chorus of the long-forgotten song.

As he neared the water he suddenly became conscious of what he was doing, and started back with a feeling of alarm.

Then he urged himself forward, saying angrily:

"Fool that I am to think of such a thing! A woman singing in this wilderness. All foolishness! I heard nothing more than I can hear at any time—a woman of my fancy. Let me see what there is to see."

He was about to take a step forward, when to his astonishment, the plaintive notes of a guitar were borne to him on the summer wind, hung for a moment over him like a spell, then died away in a marmur of melody.

At first Edward Hale knew not what to do, he could not speak, he could not stir, he could only look, listen, and wonder.

At length recovering his courage, he determined, come what would, to fathom the mystery.

So he struck out boldly, pushed from tree to tree, from rock to rock, stopping only when he found himself on the edge of a quiet lake whose waters spread out before him so bright, so beautiful, that for a minute he could but look around him in mute surprise.

But he looked in vain for the woman—the woman of his fancy; she was nowhere to be seen, she had disappeared. No song now, no music—nothing!

"No woman here," whispered the young man, seat-

ing himself on a rock near the water. "Still I heard a woman's voice, and the notes of a guitar. I am not dreaming, I have not been dreaming. Some one is on or near this lake, a woman, a man, or a ghost. Heavens! what do I see?"

He was looking over the water, and his face was pale as death.

He was looking at a man leaning over the edge of a small canoe a hundred yards from shore.

The man was fishing, apparently, and his face was turned toward his work.

But Edward Hale could see enough of his face to convince him that the man was black, also that he was no common personage.

The fisherman seemed unconscious of the presence of a stranger, and Edward Hale was loth to disturb him.

But at length he cried out:

"Halloo, there! halloo! halloo!"

The fisherman looked up quietly from his work, turned his eyes shoreward, grunted, then seizing the oars in the canoe, began to move slowly away.

"Come back, you lunatic, come back," cried the young man, unwilling to have his curiosity thus easily defeated. "What do you mean by leaving so suddenly?"

The man in the boat turned and faced him in an instant.

"What'll ye have?" he growled, almost fiercely. "Don't keep me waiting."

It was some seconds before Edward Hale replied, and in the interview, he gave the stranger in the boat his closest attention.

The age of the man he could not exactly tell, whether he was fifty or a hundred, he had the appearance of a centenarian; he was gray almost to whiteness, bent nearly double, very black, very wrinkled, very careworn, and in his actions very queer and strange. Still, he looked rugged, and despite his age,

was, doubtless, a person whom no common man could handle.

In stature he was not much over five feet tall, though he was so bent, his height could not be well determined.

He was dressed in buckskin, was armed with a rifle and a long glittering knife. The knife was in his belt, the rifle lay by him in the canoe.

"You seem very anxious to get away," at length spoke up Edward Hale, approaching a little nearer the water's edge. "Where do you make your home?"

The African pointed to a small, green spot, an island in the middle of the lake, and said, by gesture, that he lived there.

"And what do you do in this wild place, and you all alone?" asked Edward Hale, showing his surprise in various ways. "How do you pass your time?"

"I fish and hunt," replied the man, as he gave his boat a sidelong turn, "and then I hunt and fish."

"And do you ever sing?" questioned the young man, suddenly remembering the voice he had heard. "I heard some one singing a while ago."

"It wasn't me," said the man, slowly; "I never sing."

"Who was it, then?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You mean you *will* not tell me."

The African's eyes flashed.

"You are very wise," he said, half sneeringly, though he smiled as he said it. "What is your name?"

"Edward Hale."

"And you live?"

"Nowhere just now. To tell the truth I am turned around in this wilderness. I am lost."

A wild laugh, almost a shriek, came from the negro as he heard this.

"I am sorry you are lost," he exclaimed, at length, stopping abruptly in his laugh. "Hereafter stay at home as I do, and fear nothing."

For some seconds Edward Hale was silent. He was looking at the island on which his strange acquaintance made his home.

"I wouldn't live where you do for all the world," at length he said, pointing to the island. "I'll wager anything the place is haunted. What do you call your island?"

"I do not call it anything," replied the man, "but some folks call it, very foolishly though, Spectre Isle. Have you any idea it's haunted?"

Something in the negro's voice, in his looks or actions, or in the way he said it, caused the young man to shudder; but he mastered himself directly, and replied:

"I don't believe in spectres, but if I did, I should come here to see them."

The stranger laughed.

Edward Hale continued:

"Do you live by yourself—alone?"

The negro gave his interlocutor a searching glance, then replied:

"Folks have called me 'The Hermit' for many a day; and isn't that enough to satisfy ye? Who ever saw any one with me?"

The African came a little nearer shore, rose to his feet, hauled in his nets, then settling himself down in his canoe, seized the oars, and bending his back to the task, despite young Hale's entreaties, rowed swiftly away.

"A strange man, whoever he is," said the young man, with his eyes on the fast receding boat. "There, he is out of sight; a bend in the shore has hidden him from view. What I know of him amounts to almost nothing. And the woman whose voice I heard singing so sweetly, what have I learned of her? Nothing, absolutely nothing."

He lapsed into silence, and waited and watched, hoping for the return of the strange, old man, but he watched and waited in vain; the strange, old man was gone for good.

"Gone, gone," said the youth, as he turned and entered the wood. "Is it anything strange that I should stand in awe of such a man? I know not what to make of him. I only know that he is very strange and queer. Hark! what is that I hear?"

A slight breath of wind came up from the ravine laden with music—the plaintive notes of a guitar, this time accompanied by a woman's voice of rare sweetness.

For a moment Edward Hale stood as if rooted to the ground, then, with a hoarse cry and a look of superstitious awe, he walked rapidly away.

In a few minutes the woman's voice and the notes of the guitar could not be heard.

"The sooner I get out of this ghostly place the better for me," said the young man, as he hurried along. "I'll wager my head a foul murder has been committed in this wood—a woman, likely, murdered in cold blood. Did the weird old African have anything to do with it? If he did not, I am badly fooled, badly fooled."

Reaching the edge of the wood, our young friend came to a halt, and, with his back against a tree, let his eyes wander over the prairie, though to divert his mind from that which had caused his retreat, he could not do.

Still he continued standing with his back against a tree, looking out over the prairie.

Presently he thought he heard footsteps approaching.

He listened, with his head bent forward.

He heard nothing, saw nothing; he was foolishly alarmed.

"Always frightened, always trembling at my own shadow," he said, as he straightened himself up, and turned his eyes once more toward the prairie. "If I am not a coward, what am I?"

To this a reply was given, but Edward Hale did not hear it.

A hideous monster, in plumes and paint, a scowling

savage, closely followed by a vampire looking wretch, was creeping up behind him.

The foremost rascal was apparently unarmed; the fiend behind him held in his hand a huge, glittering knife, the blade at least ten inches long.

Quietly, cautiously, the savage brutes glided from tree to tree.

Edward Hale heard nothing.

Presently the dusky villains came to a halt, but directly, without a word, the one in advance moved forward slowly, cautiously, quietly, like a panther ready to spring.

Pretty soon he stopped, crouched down, and with his glittering eyes fastened on the tree against which young Edward Hale was leaning, sprang forward with the rapidity of lightning, and before the young man had time to turn aside, he was fastened to the tree so tightly, that he could not move.

The redskin stood behind the tree, but his arms were around it, and between the tree and his arms was Edward Hale, fastened as in a vice.

At first young Hale was so frightened that he could not speak, and so tightly was he crowded to the tree, that to get away was out of the question.

At length he managed to speak, and what he said was this:

"Whoever you are, don't crush the life out of me. I can scarcely breathe. Do you want to murder me?"

The savage, whose arms were around him, did not answer, but the savage who had lingered in the rear, sprang forward at this instant, and shaking his knife in the face of the helpless man, hissed like an adder:

"Pale rascal must die. Saul Slashaway told him to shoot Sandy Jim. Sandy Jim listen, overhear all, tell redskin to look sharp and kill young paleface devil, before he kill Sandy Jim. Redskin good warrior, he watch, he listen, he find young hunter, catch him, and now he kill him as he would a dog."

The savage ceased speaking, sheathed his knife, stepped back a pace, and drawing from his belt a

hatchet of polished steel, with a yell that was blood-curdling in the extreme, aimed a blow at the young man's head.

If Edward Hale ever thought his time had come, it was at this moment. He saw the murderous implement flash in the light of the setting sun, heard the fierce yell of the monster before him; and terrified, bewildered, with a prayer on his lips, he closed his eyes, and awaited the blow that would lay him cold in death.

But the tomahawk of the savage monster fell not on the young man's head, for, before it could descend, the sharp, whip-like crack of a rifle rang out upon the air, and with a shriek, a gurgle, and a groan, the would-be murderer dropped his weapon, threw up his hands, and fell lifeless to the ground.

Not knowing whether he was in the world or out of it, Edward Hale opened his eyes and looked around him, and what he saw was this:

On the ground before him lay an Indian warrior, shot dead in his tracks; to the left of him, the savage who had held him to the tree, was shooting through the wood like a frightened deer; and to his right, the man who had saved his life was making for the lake which lay beyond with all his speed.

As soon as he could get his voice, the young man cried out to the latter to halt, but at this, for some reason or other, the man redoubled his speed, and was soon lost to view.

"Anyway, I know who my perserver is," said Hale, turning his eyes on the fallen redskin; "but why he should save my life is more than I can tell. I thought I had more to fear from him than from any one else. But now I know better. The Hermit of Spectre Isle is a man, he saved my life. God bless him!"

He was going to say more, but at this moment the cap or sort of hood that covered the redskin's head fell off, revealing to the astonished gaze of young Hale, a mass of hair, almost red.

"An Indian with red hair!" exclaimed the young

man, excitedly. "I don't believe it possible. Heavens!"

A terrible thought came to him at this moment—a thought that nearly took away his breath.

"It may be so," at length he said, stooping down and examining the man on the ground. "Ah! yes, the man is white. The same, the very same. Dead, dead!"

The man on the ground was Sandy Jim.

CHAPTER II.

SAUL SLASHAWAY AND EDWARD HALE.

SAUL SLASHAWAY'S home was a cave, and at the time Edward Hale made the startling discovery that the man before him was Sandy Jim, Saul Slashaway was in his cave, preparing his evening meal.

"People say I am crazy," soliloquized the old man, "but that's whar they're badly fooled. I ain't very crazy, not very; at least I think so. Howsumever, if folks want to call me a leetle wild, I shan't object—it's their privilege."

The old man mumbled over something to himself, then went on aloud:

"Edward Hale—that's what he called himself, I bleeve, and that's what I shall call him when I see

him, for I shall see him again. Mighty, wasn't he frightened when I commanded him to kill Sandy Jim. Blast me, if I haven't a notion that he'll do it. Sandy Jim dead upon the ground, his throat cut from ear to ear. Heavens! wouldn't I feel happy. Sandy Jim dead, and Slashaway, the Fearless, will worship the man who killed him as long as life remains!"

The old hunter lapsed into silence, finished preparing his food, ate what was before him without a word, then wrapping himself up in his blanket, lay down in one corner of the room, and was soon soundly asleep.

He slept until broad daylight without waking: then he roused himself, ate a light meal of bread and cold venison, after which he took down his gun, and started out for a morning's jaunt over the prairie.

"I'll find Edward Hale, if I can," muttered the old man, as he journeyed along. "Who knows what the young chap's been up to. Maybe he's killed Sandy Jim. Well, we shall see, we shall see."

In about an hour the old hunter found himself on the edge of a dense forest of maple, oak, and ash, and the first sound that greeted him as he entered the wood, was the report of a rifle, sounding out but a rod or two away.

At first the old man was startled, but immediately he smiled grimly, and advanced into the wood with a quiet rapidity that betokened anything but alarm.

"Edward Hale—that's who it is," said Slashaway, in a cheerful voice. "I told him to kill Sandy Jim, and he has done it. Sandy Jim, the murderer, is dead."

He stopped speaking suddenly, for at this instant he found himself face to face with the object of his search.

On finding himself once more in the clutches of Slashaway, the Fearless, Edward Hale was frightened enough, but he controlled his feelings as best he could, and said, in as strong a voice as he could command:

"I didn't expect to meet you in this wood, old man. Do you live here?"

The hunter chuckled.

"Live here? Of course I don't. I live five miles from here, maybe more; live in a cave. Then ye thought ye'd seen the last of me when ye left me yesterday noon? Thought so, did ye? Ho! ho! I'm not a fool, young man, if I am crazy—not a fool. But you—what have you been doing? Where did you stay last night?"

"In this wood, of course. Where else should I stay?"

"And you rested well, I reckon?" continued the hunter, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "Ye look sort o' spry."

"But I don't feel spry, by any means," replied the young man, with a poor attempt at a laugh. "I came near being devoured last night."

"By wolves?"

"Yes, by wolves. I didn't sleep very well. Wolves are not first-class companions."

The old hunter was silent a moment, thinking. Then he roused up all of a sudden, his eyes flashed, the muscles of his face twitched convulsively, and bending forward, so that his hot breath touched the young man's face, he fairly roared:

"Where is Sandy Jim? You remember what I told you. Sandy Jim or you must die. Have you killed him?"

At first Edward Hale did not know what to say. Should he tell the hunter that Sandy Jim was dead? Or should he wait, and tell him only on compulsion? He concluded not to be in a hurry about disclosing the death of Sandy Jim; so he answered the hunter as follows:

"Do you take me for a murderer? Why should I kill Sandy Jim? And if you want him murdered so bad, why don't you do it yourself? For you to kill him would be a very small affair, you are so used to killing folks; but for me to shoot him, I couldn't do it, I wouldn't do it, for the world."

"Then you haven't killed him?"

The way this was spoken, the voice, the manner, sent a chill through the young man's frame, startled him so that he could not say a word.

"I asked you have you killed him?" said the hunter, in the same peculiar voice, "have you murdered Sandy Jim?"

The young man felt that to keep the facts from Slashaway any longer, would be to run the risk of being killed himself, so he answered very quietly :

"Sandy Jim is dead."

"Prove it," cried the hunter, flashing up in an instant. "If you tell the truth, if Sandy Jim is dead, anything you ask of me will I do."

"Then come with me."

Like a man whose mind is thoroughly made up, young Hale shouldered his rifle, and with the hunter at his heels, started for the wood in which he had left the outlaw's body the evening before.

"If the old man wants to think I killed him, let him think so," thought Edward Hale, as they neared the wood. "Mighty, what if the body has been devoured by wolves? what would Saul Slashaway say and do? I am almost afraid to go on. Bad luck to the wolves!"

But the young man's fears were groundless. The body of Sandy Jim lay where Edward Hale had left it, untouched, undisturbed, even by the wolves.

"Now look for yourself," said the young man, as he conducted the hunter to the spot. "Didn't I tell you the truth?"

"An Ingin warrior," muttered Slashaway, at first sight.

"Look again, a sharper look," commanded young Hale. "What do you say now? Is it not the body of Sandy Jim?"

The old hunter bowed his head, and answered almost in a whisper.

"Dead at last, the fiend, the worse than murderer, Sandy Jim! God bless the man who killed him, bless him forever?"

Bending over the lifeless form of his sworn enemy,

Slashaway, the Fearless, bowed his head, and for several minutes seemed lost as in a dream.

At length he rose to his feet, and with his eyes brimful of tears, extended his hand to the young man standing before him, and said, in a husky voice :

"You have done what I could not do, young man, you have taken the life of Sandy Jim. Many a time have I tried to kill him, but it was not for me to take his life, not for me."

"But you would kill a dog," said Edward Hale, his curiosity now thoroughly excited, "and Sandy Jim, you say, was no better than a dog."

"I wanted to shoot the villain bad enough, my lad, wanted to, but I couldn't, I couldn't."

"Why couldn't you?"

"A woman was in the way, allers, allers. No sooner would I draw bead on the monster, than the woman would glide between us, glide and stand thar all white and angel-like, glide between us like a shadow. I couldn't shoot the woman, so Sandy Jim was safe."

As he was telling this, the hunter's eyes roved about him incessantly, looked wild, strange, unnatural, and there was such a glitter in them, that Edward Hale slipped back involuntarily, more convinced than ever, that he was talking with a maniac.

"But how about Sandy Jim," he inquired at last, determined, if possible, to sift the matter to the bottom. "Had you nothing to fear from him?"

The hunter answered without delay.

"Nothin' to fear from Sandy Jim?" he said. "It was not his fault that he didn't kill me, for he has tried to often enough. Once he met me face to face, his gun sprang to his shoulder in an instant, but he didn't shoot, and why? because he couldn't. The same woman that saved him from me, saved me from him!"

The hunter ceased speaking, great beads of perspiration were on his face, and he had the appearance of a man suffering terribly.

Pretty soon he controlled himself and went on :

"Once I overheard a conversation between Sandy Jim and a comrade.

" 'Why don't you kill the old rascal, and be done with it,' said the man, in a loud voice. 'Shoot him as you would a dog.'

" 'But I can't shoot him,' was Sandy Jim's reply. 'The old wretch is haunted. No sooner do I draw bead on him, than a woman glides in before him, and, somehow, I cannot shoot, and I guess it's the same with him.'

"So you see," continued the hunter, lowering his voice, "what a woman, though dead, can do."

"And the woman—who was she?" asked Edward Hale, with a feeling of nervousness amounting almost to dread, creeping over him. "You say she is dead?"

"Yas, she is dead," replied the hunter, in an abstracted manner. "I was with her when she died, more than five years ago."

"Was she beautiful?"

The hunter wiped away a tear.

"I thought she was," he replied, "and I had every reason for thinkin' so. She was an angel. She was known to both of us—Sandy and I. I loved her, Sandy did not, though she loved him dearly. But it's over now, all past and gone."

A strange thought at this moment came into the young man's mind, and he relieved himself of it at once, though in a tone so low that the hunter was not awakened from his melancholy musings.

"I cannot help thinking," he said, "that the woman I heard yesterday singing so sweetly, is in some way connected with Slashaway and Sandy Jim. Anyway, things have a very singular look, and if I am not careful, I'll find myself in a net out of which I cannot very well escape. Wouldn't it be as well to question the old hunter a little concerning the Hermit of Spectre Isle? It may be that he can make everything clear. I'll speak to him at once."

Slashaway, the Fearless, stood with his arms folded,

and his eyes riveted on the lifeless form before him.

Edward Hale touched him on the shoulder, and said:

"You've looked that way long enough, my friend; now turn your attention to me. I want to ask you something."

"Well, ask away," replied the hunter, as he turned and stood face to face with his companion. "I am ready to answer anything you may ask. Since what has occurred, I cannot do enough for you; I'm sure I can't."

"Well, then, answer me this: Do you know of a lake a short distance from here?"

If a snake had suddenly sprang up into his face, the old hunter would not have been more startled than he was when his young companion asked him this.

"A lake, did ye say?" at last he roared. "What do ye know of the lake of shadows, or Spectre Lake, as it's sometimes called? Have ye been thar, young man?"

The eyes of the hunter were looking the young man through and through.

"I've seen the lake of shadows, as you call it," replied young Hale, as quietly as he could. "I was there yesterday. I was called there."

The hunter started.

"Tempted, war ye? Who tempted ye to visit the lake?"

"A woman."

The hunter's face turned pale.

"What was the woman like?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"I didn't see her."

"Didn't see her, and she tempted you?" said the hunter, slowly. "I don't understand. Strange, very strange."

"Strange to you, maybe, but not to me."

"How?"

"I did not see the woman, I only heard her—she was singing."

"Then you followed her voice to the lake?"

"Yes; I followed her voice, and the music of her fingers—she was playing the guitar."

The hunter was silent a moment, thinking deeply. Then he asked:

"What else did ye hear? and did ye see any one while at the lake?"

The young man answered without hesitation.

"When I approached the lake the music ceased, the voice of the woman died away, and all was still."

"What next? Did ye see any one?"

"Yes, I saw a man sitting in a canoe, fishing. The man was black."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"I spoke to him, and he answered me; he was not very talkative."

The hunter's eyes glittered.

"What did the man say?" he asked. "Anything about the woman?"

"I asked him if he had heard the voice of a woman singing, and he said he had not. Then I thought I had been dreaming, or had imagined it all. A strange dream, though, I think, very strange."

"Yes, very strange, very strange," repeated the hunter, musingly. "I think you must have been dreaming. You heard nothing; no woman was there. I am sure no woman was there, and that you heard nothing, very sure."

But a minute afterward, Edward Hale heard the strange old man whispering to himself, and what he said was this:

"Marguret, my Marguret. God bless her and keep her from harm."

Then he shouldered his rifle, and with a quiet "Come on" to his young companion, moved slowly away.

Reaching the prairie in a few minutes they halted, and Slashaway said:

"This timber won't be very healthy for us in an hour from now, so I guess we had better leave. Sandy Jim had a crowd of followers, and they'll be looking for him, I reckon, before very long. The redskins, too, are very likely to be around here pretty soon. Come on. I will guide you to my home."

Without more ado, the two men struck out boldly over the level plain, and soon the wood, with all its mysteries, was so far behind as to be scarcely seen.

"We'll come to a little river pretty soon, my lad," remarked the old hunter, as they journeyed along. "The land grows more mountainous every minute, and pretty soon we'll reach a strip o' timber, and then a river. You see I know this country very well. The reason is, I've lived here ten years or more—lived right here."

In a few minutes more the river spoken of by the hunter, flowed at their feet. It was a beautiful stream, quite narrow, but very deep and rapid.

"Now what's to be done," spoke up Edward Hale, as they came to a halt on the banks of the river. "Shall we go down or up?"

"Down," replied the hunter, quickly; "but not as we have been traveling—afoot. I've got a canoe here somewhere, that we'll do well to use. We can't afford to walk when we can ride."

Without much difficulty, Slashaway found the boat which he had hidden some time before, and without delay the two men got into it, and the hunter, seizing the oars, guided the frail bark down the stream.

But this was only for a little while. Before Edward Hale knew what his companion was about, the boat was turned into a sort of harbor or indentation in the shore and brought to a full stop.

"Here's where we land," said the old hunter, quietly dropping the oars in the canoe. "Follow me."

The hunter sprang ashore, Edward Hale followed his example, and together the two men pulled the canoe ashore.

Then they started for the hunter's home, distance about half a mile away.

"I live here part o' the time, and part o' the time somewhere else," remarked the old man as they neared his place of abode. "My residence is a hole in the ground, or, if you please, a cave."

Halting at the foot of what seemed to be a huge pile of rocks, the hunter suddenly stooped down and began to examine, though with considerable agitation, a number of footprints in the sand.

"Mighty strange, mighty queer and strange," he muttered, at length, rising to his feet and glancing furtively about him. "I didn't think the red imps cunning enough to find my hiding-place. Howsum-ever, the rascals have been here, for look at the moccasin tracks in the sand. Thunder, I am almost afraid to go in, for the sheband, for all I know, may be packed with redskins."

Several times the hunter walked around his rocky fortress, but seeing nothing further of a suspicious nature, he quietly removed a large, flat stone from a narrow, upright fissure or crevice in the rocky ledge, and closely followed by his young companion, made his way within, closed the opening with a rock as large as the one on the outside, struck a light, then turning to his young friend who stood an amazed and silent spectator of the hunter's movements, said, with a quiet smile:

"You see my dwelling is no one-horse affair. Everything is dry, clean, and comfortable. Here I live and ask nothing of no one. But I don't intend to live here always, I'm sure I don't, very sure!"

Something in the hunter's voice, or in the way he wound up his remark, brought to the memory of Edward Hale, his first meeting with the strange, old man, the facts that he had learned about him at the settlement, the warning that had been given him couched in the words: "Look out for Slashaway, the Fearless, he is mad," and many other things associated in some way or other with his strange companion.

"Your cave is as comfortable as a cave can be," said the young man at length, "but I agree with you when you say you shan't live here always. In my opinion the redskins will assist you to remove, and that, too, in a very short time. Mercy! look at those eyes. We are not alone. That black object—what is it? Look, look!"

A low growl from one corner of the room broke forth at this instant, and almost immediately following, a monster-looking object, nothing less than a huge, black bear, rolled from the darkness, and stood with extended jaws and glaring eyes looking from one to the other of the astonished men.

"A horrible monster," cried young Hale, as soon as he could get his breath. "Let me put a bullet through his brain."

But when he saw the old hunter rush forward and throw his arms around the monster's neck and caress him as he would a child, he lowered his rifle and stared at the man and the bear with a look of terror and surprise.

"Mad as the wind," at length he said; "Slash-away, the Fearless, is mad, mad. I must kill the brute, or the hunter will be torn into pieces before my eyes."

The young man drew his hunting-knife from his belt, and rushed forward; but before he could thrust it into the bear, the hunter caught him by the arm, and fairly yelled in his ear:

"You young villain, what do ye mean? Would you kill my best friend? Then murder this harmless beast."

"Mad, mad, crazy as a loon," whispered Edward Hale, with his hunting-knife still uplifted, and his eyes riveted on the hunter's face. Do you want that ugly beast to strangle you?"

"Harmless as a kitten," returned Slashaway, quietly. "Young man, this bear is one of the best friends I ever had, and though his name is Tempest,

he's as quiet and docile when unprovoked as any one could wish."

"And is he yours—this bear, this Tempest?" inquired young Hale, slowly sheathing his knife.

"Mine? No, he belongs to the Hermit of Spectre Isle."

When the hunter said this, he turned his eyes on his companion's face, and looked closely to see what effect his words would produce, and he was not surprised when he saw his young friend start, and lose for an instant his self-possession.

"He suspicions somethin', the young buck does," whispered Slashaway, to himself; "but I think he only heard her sing and play; he didn't see her—Marguret, my Murguret. But I've no time to fool away. Something's gone wrong over there, and I am wanted. How do I know? Tempest, the Hermit's bear, brings me the news. I was badly fooled when I thought my home had been visited by redskins; it was the Hermit who made the tracks in the sand. He entered my cave, the Hermit did, found me gone, then he went out and left the bear in to tell me that something had gone wrong—with Marguret. Heavens! what if the red imps have been there? It frightens me to think of it. I must be off at once."

He removed a stone from a niche in the wall to let the sunlight in, blew out his torch, and started for the entrance of the cave without a word.

"Where are you going?" asked young Hale, quickly, as the old man reached the door or entrance of the cave. "What has happened to disturb you?"

The old hunter answered without looking up.

"I am going to Spectre Isle. The old Hermit has sent for me."

"And am I not going with you?" asked the young man, a little confused.

Slashaway replied in the same quiet tone as before.

"I am going alone—I and the bear. This cave is as safe a place as you can find, and here you can stay

as long as you wish. Plenty of food, plenty of everything; make yourself at home."

Seemingly anxious to avoid being questioned, the hunter pushed his way out of the cave, and with the bear, Tempest, at his side, proceeded to the river, launched his boat, sprang in, seized the oars, and with a word to Tempest, seated in the prow of the canoe, rowed swiftly and silently away.

CHAPTER III.

FIGHT, FLIGHT, AND CAPTURE.

"I DON'T know what to make of him, I really don't," said Edward Hale, as soon as Slashaway, the Fearless, was out of sight and hearing. "Sometimes I think him sane enough, and then again I can't but think that he is mad. Anyway, it's just as well that he has gone, and that I am alone. Now I'll get my traps together, and Slashaway shall see me no more."

But at this moment the woman of Spectre Isle, with her beautiful, bell-like voice, came into the young man's mind, and, for some reason or other, his determination to leave all behind him, the woman included, and be off, was abandoned in an instant.

"I'll risk the old hunter's madness," he said, "and stay until the woman of Spectre Isle ceases to be a thing of doubt. Ah, I have it now. I'll follow the old hunter to the lake, and do what I can at once to solve the mystery."

Acting on this latter thought, the young man seized his rifle, and quickly crawled out of the cave.

After looking around him a spell, he shouldered his gun, and without knowing exactly what direction to take, moved rapidly away.

"I think I am going right," he muttered, after walking a distance of several yards. "I guess I know what I'm about."

But in this he was mistaken, for he was completely turned around; in fact, he was lost without knowing it.

Still he continued to advance, wandered about for several hours, and at last halted, with a feeling of dread creeping over him.

After a short pause he went on, but swifter than he had gone before, in fact, on a full run, and for this reason: A dozen or more well-mounted redskins were in pursuit.

True, they were half a mile or so away, but they were mounted, and being mounted, every bound they made, brought them nearer the man on foot.

Knowing full well what it was to fall into the clutches of such monsters, Edward Hale exerted himself to the utmost to escape; he fairly flew over the ground, but it answered him not, the redskins would soon be upon him.

"Heaven save me from them," cried the young man, with his heart in his throat. "God help me! they are almost up to me. What shall I do?"

"Why run ye lunatic, run as tho' all the imps in hell war arter ye," exclaimed a voice at this instant close to his ear.

As if he had been shot, Edward Hale stopped running, and stared mutely around him.

"Who's chasin' uv ye, my innocence?" said the voice, louder than before.

This time the young man followed the voice to his source, and saw for the first time that he was on the bank of a small stream, also that there was a canoe

right before him, and in the canoe a man—the man who had spoken.

When he saw the man, our hero rushed to him and cried :

“The redskins ! the redskins ! What shall I do ? What can I do ?”

The stranger's face, which at first was pleasant, suddenly assumed a scowling aspect, but his voice said softly :

“Pile in yer, sonny, an' we'll try tu git away from 'em. I'm sorry the red varmints are chasin' uv ye.”

Edward Hale did not need a second invitation, but got into the boat without delay, and not a moment too soon, for the redskins, at this juncture, dashed down to the river, yelling like fiends.

But when they got to the river's edge, young Hale and his new-found friend were fifty yards away, rowing with all their strength.

Wild with rage, the Indians sent a volley of rifle-shots after them, but warned by the trapper, the men fell down in the boat, and thus escaped unharmed.

“Now take us ef ye kin, ye rascals,” said the trapper, as the redskins began to howl with disappointment. “The red bucks are all in a muddle, they don't know what tu do.”

“But their horses are fleet,” suggested young Hale, “and they may overtake us yet—by land.”

The stranger said nothing, but tossed his head on either side of him as much as to say. “Look at the shore.”

The young man did so, and for the first time noticed that all along the river were trees, rocks, brush, and little mounds, impassable barriers to men on horseback.

“The red cusses kin foller us only by water, young man,” at length spoke up the stranger. “Ef they hed a boat——”

“They've got one. Look ! look !” cried Edward Hale, all of a sudden. “The redskins are right behind us.”

The trapper glanced quickly around, then he settled

himself in the canoe, and said in a voice low but firm :

"Ye speak the truth, my lad, the red critters are chasin' us. I didn't think they could find thor canoe, but they found it. Ther boat war in ther bushes near ther stream. It was Saul Slashaway's boat—Saul Slashaway's and mine. Mighty Moses, how the red bucks yell."

Yelling, screaming, and shouting, the blood-thirsty Sioux worked like madmen at the oars, and every sweep they made seemed to lessen the distance between their victims and themselves.

"It's all up with us," said Edward Hale, as he noticed how rapidly the redskins were gaining on them. "Look out there, my friend, they're going to shoot !"

As he spoke, the young man fell flat on his face in the bottom of the boat, while almost instantly a volley of rifle shots hissed above him.

Failing to bring them down by shooting at them, the redskins redoubled their efforts at the oars, expecting in a few minutes to capture them, or get so near them that they could shoot them down at will.

But the whites worked gallantly, and for the distance of half a mile, held their own.

Then they lost strength, and the redskins gained on them rapidly, until at last the fugitives, knowing full well that to remain longer on the water was to fall into the hands of their merciless foes, took to the shore, hoping to find a hiding-place somewhere among the rocks.

And they found one, or rather a place of defense, and they found it not a moment too soon, for the redskins were soon closing around them, yelling like fiends.

In a sort of recess or indentation in a rocky ledge, the whites retreated, and by rolling three or four huge boulders before them, a fortress, tolerably secure, was made.

"It's the best we kin du, young man," whispered the trapper, as he inspected the priming of his rifle.

"It ain't at all likely thet we'll git off 'ithout a scratch or two, but we'll fling a leetle lead at the varmints jist fer fun. Look sharp thar, now, an' don't shoot until ye git a darn good aim. Here they come."

Whooping and howling, the painted monsters emerged from the rocks, and with a recklessness that boded evil to the whites, dashed toward them; but when they saw the rifles of the fugitives gleaming over the rocks, they halted abruptly, and, coward-like, quickly withdrew to a safer distance.

"They don't like the locks of things, the rascals," remarked Edward Hale, with some satisfaction at the way the redskins scampered away. "It wouldn't surprise me if they troubled us no more. Anyway, that's the cast things have at present. What say you, my friend?"

The young man turned on the trapper an inquiring look, and for the first time noticed his height, general appearance, and attire.

The man was over six feet in height, very slim, quite muscular, long arms, long legs, long fingers and hands, a beardless face, set off with keen, grey eyes, and a nose slightly aquiline and very sarcastic—a face at once cold, cunning, and determined.

The trapper's dress was of buckskin, all but the cap, and that was made of the fur of a wildcat.

The name of his new-found friend, as Edward afterward learned, was Robert Blake, nicknamed, for some unaccountable reason, Onion Bob.

And "Onion B," as we shall call him, was an original character, as the reader will soon perceive.

"So ye think we're through 'ith 'em, do ye?" said the hunter, after surveying the young man from head to foot; "think they've dug out for keeps?"

"It seems so," replied Hale, quickly, "though I don't know for sure."

The hunter gave a laugh that sounded very much like a snort.

"Yas, I'm quite sure ye don't know, myself," he said, while his eye twinkled merrily. "Why, ye lee-

the blubber, the red varmints hev jist opened the fray. Don't fool yerself about 'em leavin', but git yer popper in shootin' order, an' look out fer squalls. The painted murderers 'ill come in sight directly."

And the hunter was right. The redskins suddenly showed themselves in quite formidable numbers, and thinking to take the whites by a determined charge, with blood-curdling yells rushed toward them.

But the whites were on the alert, and one of them, Edward Hale, took a quick aim at the foremost savage, pulled trigger, and, strange to say, brought him to the ground.

At this the savages suddenly became convinced that there was danger ahead of them, so seizing their fallen comrade, they turned and sought safety by a precipitate retreat.

"One redskin less to fight," said young Hale, coolly reloading his rifle. "The first good shot I ever made."

"A noble shot, anyway," rejoined Onion Bob; but he added to himself: "I'm mighty 'fraid he can't do it agin; it looked wery much like an accident. Howsumever, time will tell."

Not willing to expose themselves to the murderous fire of the whites, the redskins remained quiet for some time, doubtless deep in the formation of a plan, whereby the fugitives could be brought to terms.

"It won't last long, this quiet," said the tall hunter, with his eagle eye taking in everything around him. "They're too sharp tu attack us agin in an open manner, so look out fer tricks. 'Thunder an' lightnin'! B'ars an' buffelers! Lord!"

"What is it? What do you see?" cried Edward Hale, springing up and cocking his rifle. "Anything out of the way?"

"I should think so. Look at that large rock yonder."

"Where?"

"Near thet scraggy tree."

"Well, what of it?"

"Enough; I seed the hull thing guv a suddint

twist, an' roll right over. It is round, ye see, almost round. Look, thar it goes agin."

And sure enough, the rock in question suddenly began to move, and being almost round, rolled over several times without stopping.

"Some one's behind it pushing it," suggested Edward Hale; "an Indian warrior, likely."

"Five uv ther red apes, more likely," replied the trapper, quickly. "Don't ye see the rock ar mighty big?"

"Big enough for the purpose they have in view, no doubt," replied the young man, after a moment's silence. "There it goes again. Look!"

Once more the rock rolled over, then again and again, and at every turn, Onion Bob uttered a quiet curse.

"The miserable devils are comin' fer us as straight as a string," he growled, "an' what's more, I don't know how to stop 'em. Ef it war a tree we could shoot through it—but a rock—I'm mighty 'fraid it's all up 'ith us."

It was a neat trick of the redskins—this rock business—and completely upset the calculations of the whites, and put them at their wits end.

"We can't stop the red rascals, in my opinion," said young Hale, fixing his eyes on the rock. "What shall we do? Stick here and fight?"

"I reckon thet's about all we kin du," replied the hunter, with considerable nervousness in his looks and actions. "Thar's no use o' runnin'."

"And if we stay and fight?"

"Thar's a big chance o' us gittin' killed and scalped. Howsumever, we mought as well stick to it, an' do the best we kin. Thar's nothin' like tryin'. What do ye say? Shall we stick, run, or cave in?"

"Stick," replied Edward, shortly. "Let us die fighting."

With this determination the two men began to prepare themselves for the coming struggle.

The hunter put aside his gun, and taking from his

belt a long-bladed knife, and a revolver of almost equal length, examined them both very carefully, after which he said:

"Keep yer eyes on the rock, young man, an' the fust head ye see, blaze away at it. I ain't so much afraid uv these chaps as I am uv the fellers what's waitin back yender in the brush. We may scare these rascals off, but the others—I don't know, I don't know."

Determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible, our two friends waited the slow approach of the rock, and as it came nearer and nearer, they grew impatient for the struggle, which they well knew would be one of life or death.

Five minutes passed. The wily redskins were well aware that the palefaces were awaiting their approach, so they made no attempt at silence, but as they pushed and urged the rock along, curses loud and deep, shouts and yells, issued from their throats.

"The painted imps make noise enough," said young Hale, as the redskins gave a sudden yell. "Look there, what do you think of that? They can roll the rock no further, it has struck against a tree."

It was even so. The rock had come in contact with a low, dwarf tree or shrub, and lay, an immovable weight, within a dozen yards of the rocky fortress of the trapper and his young companion.

Finding themselves in a measure defeated, the painted rascals began to howl at the top of their voices, while the whites, overjoyed at the discomfiture of their savage foes, sent up a shout that made the rocks ring.

"I reckon we've got 'em," laughed Onion Bob, at last, "an' in more ways than one. What think ye, sonny?"

"I think they'll find some trouble in getting back," was the quick reply. "They can't hide behind a rock in going back, not very much they can't."

"An' it won't do tu git up an' run," suggested the trapper, with a quiet chuckle. "In my opinion, all

they kin do is to lay thar and wait for re-enforcements."

"Which they intend to do, I reckon, by the look of things," put in the young man. "It would do me good to get a pop at one of 'em."

"You'll hev a chance pretty soon," rejoined the hunter, quietly. "Do ye see anythin' tu yer left?"

The young man turned his eyes in the direction indicated by his companion, gave a quick glance then turned and said:

"The red imps are coming to the assistance of their friends. They will make a rush at us pretty soon in order to give these scoundrels, imps, in front of us a chance to pick us off. What shall we do?"

"Fight 'em, in course," replied the trapper, quickly. "You see to the chaps behind the rock, watch 'em clus, an' I'll settle the hash o' the others."

The foremost of the redskins, or chief of the band, at this moment yelled something in the Indian tongue, and at once dashed forward with a terrible cry, followed by all his braves.

But he paid for his boldness with his life, for scarcely had he advanced a dozen paces, when the hunter's rifle sprang to his shoulder, a quick aim followed, a report keen and startling rang out upon the air, and with a shriek, a gurgle, and a groan, the painted wretch threw up his hands, and fell to the ground, dead as a stone.

Seeing their leader fall, the redskins did not, as is usual in such cases, turn and run, but with maddening cries of rage, rushed forward to avenge his death.

Then it was that the whites felt that the time of life or death had come, and with a bravery unsurpassed in Indian warfare, stood firmly at their posts.

A second of time went by, then Onion Bob again brought his rifle to his shoulder, and once more a savage monster bit the dust.

This time the redskins quailed, and with a wild cry of mingled rage and disappointment, turned and fled pell-mell back to their retreat.

The fight was over. The redskins behind the rock, with the cowardly instincts of their race, moved not in behalf of their more courageous friends, nor made a single effort to leave their dangerous concealment.

This the Indians in the bushes noticed, and it made them wild with rage.

The whites could hear them cursing among themselves, but what they intended to do to relieve the redskins behind the rock from their embarrassing position, or whether they intended to do anything, was more than they could tell.

"It wouldn't surprise me if they went off and left 'em, the cowardly rascals," at last spoke up Edward Hale. "It would be paying them up in their own coin. I really wish they would."

Five minutes passed. Then the hunter noticed a huge warrior coming toward him, bearing something white in his hand, which he soon saw was a flag of truce.

"They want ter make peace," whispered he to the young man, as he called his attention to the approaching savage. "Howsumever——"

The redskin suddenly halted, and cried out, in broken English:

"Red man ready to talk. What say palefaces? Won't hurt nobody. 'Talk much, talk little, talk good deal."

"What do ye want tu talk about, ole moonshine?" returned Onion Bob, in an angry voice. "Hev ye got a pain somewhar, an' want tu be relieved from duty?"

"No pain, no nothing," replied the Indian, shaking his head. "Red warrior mighty cross, feel mighty ugly."

The trapper laughed sarcastically.

"Yas, I reckon ye do feel ugly," he said, at length, "an' ye hev reason tu. Ef a couple o' my friends hed been busted afore my eyes, I'd feel ugly, tu. But say yer say, my posy, durued quick, an' be off. Are ye hungry?"

"No hungry, no nothing," returned the redskin, sharply, "only mad."

"What fer are ye mad?"

"Big red cowards behind rock, no good, ought to die. Ingin help 'em no more, but let white chaps kill 'em. Will do it?"

The trapper divined at once that the redskins intended to abandon their comrades behind the rock, so he answered with a will:

"Kill 'em? Of course we will. Jist you an' the rest take yerselves off, an', an' we'll fix 'em. They played it pretty low on you, the cowards. Oh, it's all right; we'll see to 'em; don't trouble yerself about thet."

Apparently satisfied, the savage returned to his friends, and to the astonishment of both Edward and the hunter, the whole painted crowd in a few minutes began to move slowly over the prairie.

At first the redskins behind the rock could not believe their eyes, for none of them understanding English, and no one telling them in their native tongue, it was not possible for them to know the why or wherefore of the case in question.

But they were not long in the shade; over the prairie their comrades in arms were moving, on, on, until, in half an hours' time, they could no longer be seen.

Then the abandoned redskins, realizing how matters stood, began to wail and howl like dogs baying at the moon.

This was too much for honest Onion Bob, who shook his fist at the rock, and fairly roared:

"Halloo! thar, ye miserable, whinin' devils. What du ye mean by kickin' up sich a racket? Kim out, an' show yer greasy heads, an' we'll fight it out hand tu hand!"

The redskins did not answer, but one of them at this moment a little too frolicsome in his grief, showed his head above the rock, whereupon Onion Bob quickly took it for a mark, and, drawing bead, blazed away.

The shot proved effective, for with an agonizing cry the redskin sprang to his feet, reeled backward a dozen or more paces, turned once and a half around, then with a gurgle and a groan, fell forward a lifeless weight to the ground.

Then the remaining savages howled worse than ever, and as they howled, the whites derided them with mocking laughter.

"It's all very well to laugh," at length spoke up Edward Hale, "but to come down to business, please inform me what we're going to do about it. How are we to get out of this trap?"

"Git out as we kim in, I s'pose," replied the hunter, dryly, "walk out."

"And get riddled with bullets," returned the young man, sharply. "The moment we attempt to leave——"

"They'll blaze away at us, yas."

"And the moment they attempt to take themselves off——"

"We'll blaze at 'em. So ye see they've got us an' we've got 'em; an' that's mighty leetle to brag uv on either side, mighty leetle. Heavings!"

At this moment the savages, without any warning, sprang to their feet, and with yells that fairly curdled the blood, dashed down upon the whites.

Then a hand to hand conflict ensued, and though of short duration, it was a bloody strife.

With rare presence of mind Onion Bob seized his revolver, and evading with wonderful alertness the flashing tomahawks of his foes, emptied every chamber of his weapon into the savage crowd.

The effect was murderous in the extreme. One hideously painted monster received a bullet through his head, another rolled to the ground his heart riddled with balls, while a third with a wild shriek and an upward spring, a bullet wound in his breast, fell headlong to the ground.

Only one redskin was left, and as the trapper turned

from his bloody work, the savage in question sprang upon him, and bore him to the ground.

Then ensued a terrible struggle.

Yells, shrieks, curses, groans, rent the air, as like two blood-hounds the hunter and the savage fought.

At length the redskin got in a blow on the hunter's head that almost killed him, but at the same instant, the savage monster received in return a thrust from the hunter's knife, that laid him cold in death.

Then the hunter did what he never did before, he swooned away.

In a few minutes consciousness began to return, and the first thing he thought of was Edward Hale.

"The young cuss—whar is he?" said the hunter, feebly.

A groan answered him.

"Dying!" stammered the hunter, looking around him. "That he is, poor fellow, 'ith his head busted."

On the ground within a few feet of the trapper, lay Edward Hale, apparently dead as a stone.

Quickly the hunter approached him, felt of him, he was warm; placed his hand on his heart, it fluttered; then he whispered half to himself, half aloud:

"The red buck war too much fer him, hit him on the head, nearly killed him. But he'll kin to in a minute, fer his lips are on the move. Thar, he's goin tu speak."

The young man's eyes opened, his lips moved, and he said this, looking straight into the hunter's face:

"She plays the guitar and sings, and I thought I heard her. Maybe I didn't, though. Her name is Margaret!"

He said no more, but closing his eyes, fell back in a dead swoon.

CHAPTER IV.

AMONG THE INDIANS.

WHEN Edward Hale fainted, Onion Bob quickly rose to his feet, and half suspecting that his friend was dead, muttered sorrowfully :

"Too bad, too cussed bad. Thar's nothin' I hate to see so much, as a young chap 'ith his skull busted. Durn me, ef I don't feel like blubberin' right out. But I must do somethin' for 'im afore it is too late. What shall I do?"

It occurred to the trapper at this moment that there was a stream of water at no great distance away, and it also occurred to him that a little water on the head and face of the young man might revive him, so he lost not a moment's time in procuring the water, and using it as above.

And that his remedy was a good one, the hunter had reason to believe, for no sooner had he applied it, than the young man began to show signs of life, the muscles of his face twitched convulsively, his hands moved, and soon his eyes opened, his speech came to him, and he muttered, as one in a dream :

"I have been asleep, dreaming. I can see nothing ; it is dark. Where am I, and who is this bending over me?"

The hunter placed his hand on the young man's shoulder, and replied :

"It's all right, my lad. Don't bother yerself about

whar ye are, but 'git ter yer pins as soon as possible. The fight is over, the red bucks are all dead, an' both uv our hides, thank God, are tolerably compact. Are ye feelin' a trifle better, my innocence?"

The young man answered in a voice a little stronger than at first:

"Yes, I am feeling better. I'll soon be up, I reckon, soon be on my feet. I must have had a terrible fall."

The trapper corrected him in an instant.

"It wasn't a fall ye had, young man," he said, "not a fall, but a whack over the head 'ith a darn big club, thet almost busted ye. Thar was a bloody fought, ye know. Don't ye bleeve it? Then look aroun' ye, an' see what a greasy muss thar is, an' be convinced."

As Edward Hale looked around him, he shuddered, for he had never seen such a bloody sight before in all his life.

"Terrible, terrible," he muttered, half rising to his feet. "And you killed them all, every one of them, did ye?"

"Thar's whar ye're right, young man," replied the trapper, with a jubilant laugh. "I killed 'em, I did."

"And I?—"

"You? Why, you got a crack over the head. Y didn't see ye kill anybody, an' I guess ye didn't. Howsnmever, it don't matter now who did the killin', one thing are sartin—the red bucks are dead. Are ye able tu move now, sonny?"

The young man rose to his feet, and finding that he could stand without trembling, replied as follows:

"I can get along, I guess, though I feel anything but strong. Where shall we go?"

"To the home of Slashaway, the Fearless," was the quick reply. "I've got business 'ith Slashaway."

"But he's not at home."

"How do ye know, young man?"

"I was there not more than three hours ago. Slashaway and I are friends."

The hunter turned on his young companion a piercing look, and with more force in his voice than was really necessary, inquired:

"Do ye tell me that Slashaway and you are friends? Slashaway, the Fearless, is mad—so the people say—so how kin ye to know him?"

"By accident," replied young Hale, "and by accident I obtained his friendship. When we first met he was going to kill me, but he got over that after awhile, and together we went to his cave. He was very kind to me."

The trapper muttered to himself in an abstracted manner.

"Strange, very strange," he said, "thet Slashaway should take up 'ith a stranger. Still it's jist as well thet the youngster an' he are friends."

The hunter wiped the blood from his knife, and shouldering his rifle, with a quiet "Come on" to his companion, stepped quickly over the bloody corpses of the redskins, and soon the two men were moving rapidly away from the little fortress, wherein they had fought so nobly, and so nearly lost their lives.

At length, it being nearly sundown, they came to a halt, on the edge of a slight ravine, and while Edward collected chips and sticks with which to build a fire, the trapper started out to see what he could kill in the line of game.

After a while he returned, bearing upon his back a deer, a portion of which he soon had roasting over the fire.

The men were very hungry, and as the meat was tender and juicy, they ate it with a relish.

After they had finished their repast, Edward Hale made a move to go on, but Onion Bob remarked that as it was nearly night, they had best remain where they were until the opening of the next day.

To this the young man consented, so a quantity of dry leaves were gathered, upon which they could make their beds, and as comfortably as circumstances would admit, the two men lay down to rest.

But before he was quite asleep, Edward Hale inquired of the hunter, who had risen from the ground, and was sitting with his back against a tree, whether there was any danger of being disturbed by wolves.

"I've been told that there are more wolves than redskins in this part of the country," he said, "and if that is the case, we are liable to have a pack of the hungry monsters down upon us at any moment. How is it? Are there any wolves hereabouts?"

Onion Bob snorted out an answer in these words:

"Wolves, young man, did ye say?" Why, blast ye, the timber is full uv 'em. Wolves that chew, wolves that howl an' snap; and try to devour ye—big wolves. Howsumever, I don't think we'll see any to-night, an' why? Jist fer this reason: 'Thar's four or five dead red bucks not more'n three miles from here, an' thar's whar the wolves will go. The critters will kim from miles aroun', an' go right thar, straight as a string."

"And is it safe for us to go to sleep?" asked Edward, with a little show of alarm. "Are you not afraid?"

"'Fraid?" replied the hunter, scornfully, "no I am not afraid, but ye are, an' tharfore ye'd better go tu sleep. I'll stay awake a spell, an' watch things, an' ef anythin' suspicious turns up, I'll call ye. Go tu sleep, I say, tu sleep."

Being very tired, the young man re-arranged his bed of leaves, and with his rifle by his side in easy reach, was soon sound asleep.

"He kin sleep—the little cuss—but I can't," said Onion Bob, as soon as the heavy breathing of his companion told him that the latter was asleep. "The youngster are mighty tired, I know, as well as weak from the lickin' he got, an' I want him tu sleep a long while an' get rested, fer thar's no knowin' what's afore us."

The hunter ceased speaking, and for several minutes remained perfectly motionless.

Then he took a heavy, dark-colored pipe from his

pocket, and filling and lighting it, remarked, as he put it to his mouth:

"I'll smoke and watch and watch and smoke, an' the deeper I smoke, the closer I'll watch."

An hour passed by. Onion Bob, as good as his word, still pulled at his long, black pipe, while not a sound, not even the dropping of a leaf escaped him.

At length about midnight, the hunter suddenly put aside his pipe, and turning his head, listened at what he thought was the distant baying of wolves.

After listening awhile he straightened up, and knocking the ashes from his pipe, whispered in a voice almost inaudible:

"That's music in the air, and I hear it, it's the howlin' uv wolves, an' cuss me, ef I don't b'lieve the red-tongued devils are comin' toward us. Yas, I'm sure they are, I hear 'em now 'ithout listenin'. I reckon I'd better giv the boy a punch an' notify him uv the coming danger."

Taking the young man by the heels, the hunter cracked the two together, and in this very original way aroused Edward from his slumbers.

"What's the go, my friend?" asked the young man, as soon as he was able to speak. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"Listen sharp, an' ye'll know 'ithout assistance from me," answered Onion Bob. "Do ye hear anythin'?"

"I hear a variety of sounds," was the reply, after a short silence.

"Wal, do ye hear wolves? I do."

"And they're comin' toward us," said the young man, with no apparent notice of the trapper's words. "What shall we do?"

"Stay whar we are, I reckon," replied the hunter. "Your shooter is a good one, an' so is mine. We thrashed the Ingins a while ago, an' now we'll lick the wolves."

Attracted by the fire, as well as by the meat the hunter had roasted, a pack of ferocious timber wolves

came up the ravine, and soon our two friends had almost as much to fear from them, as they had from the redskins from whom they had so recently and so miraculously escaped.

"I hadn't calculated on so many," growled Onion Bob, as he counted at least a dozen red-tongued boasts, growling and snapping at various points not over a rod away. "Durn 'em, how they howl. Yer, take this and begone."

Quick as a flash the hunter seized a burning brand, and with a yell meant to startle the wolves, hurled the red torch in the midst of the hungry crowd, which had the effect of scattering them in every direction.

But they soon came back, and fiercer than ever began to show their glistening teeth at Edward and the hunter, while at the same time they rushed in and out of the darkness, howling and snarling, snapping and barking, in a way that convinced the men that to fall into their clutches would be an affair serious in the extreme.

"It's only the fire that keeps 'em back, young man," said the hunter, as Hale tossed a stick or two more on the glowing coals. "It's a risk tho'—this fire—for the red bucks might see it, an' then——"

"It would be all day with us," put in the young man. "Come to think of it, suppose we let the fire go out, and climb a tree. What do you say?"

"It might be a good plan, and it might not," replied the hunter. "It ain't so easy climbin' a tree 'ith a gun."

"If we manage it right, it won't be much of a trick," responded Hale, with great confidence in his voice. "You get up first, I'll hand you the shooters, then I'll follow you. Come on."

Onion Bob thought the plan of his young friend a good one, so he prepared to act upon it at once.

About a dozen yards from the fire stood a large oak tree, whose branches grew very low and thick, and on this tree the hunter had his eye, though how to reach it without being devoured by the hungry monsters

gathered around it, was a problem which the hunter could not solve.

"We mought make a rush fer it," said he, "but ten chances tu one we'd git chewed inter strings afore we got thar. Kin ye think uv anythin', my lad? Ef ye kin, spit it out."

Edward Hale did not reply, but seizing a brightly burning stick from the fire, gave a startling yell, while at the same time he rushed for the tree around which the wolves were gathered, waving his brand as he ran.

The ruse was successful. The wolves seeing the flaming brand coming toward them, scattered in every direction.

Then the young man cried out:

"Don't you see how easy it is? Pick up another stick, and come on."

The trapper did not wait a second invitation, but seizing a fire-brand, made a rush for the tree, which he reached just as the feet of his young friend disappeared in the foliage above him.

"Give me the rifles," said the young man, reaching down his hand. "Hoist 'em up, quick."

The two weapons were in the speaker's hand in an instant, and in an instant more the hunter was climbing the tree like a squirrel.

"Pretty good, pretty good," chuckled Onion Bob, very well pleased with his new position. "Now we'll sit yer an' pop 'em off 'ith nobody tu say aught agin it. Thar, look; the hungry varmints are beginnin' tu show thar teeth a'ready. Wal, let 'em growl an' fight; we don't care."

Snapping, snarling, growling, snuffing the air, the wolves came slowly toward the fire, and seeing no one there to molest them, made quite bold at length, and began to devour that which the men had left of their evening meal.

At first there was enough for all, but soon the picking got so poor that the hungry beasts began to fight

among themselves, creating a horrible din, to which the men listened with a sort of grim satisfaction.

At length Edward Hale thought it about time to interfere, so he took good aim at the seeming leader of the pack, and fired.

The wolf struggled a moment, then rolled over on the ground, and was quickly pitched into by his companions, who tore him to pieces, and devoured him in an instant.

"The bloody devils," exclaimed the young man, as he saw the ugly beasts picking the bones of their comrade. "The wolf was scarcely dead when they began to suck his blood. Well, here goes again."

Once more the young man's rifle sounded, and again a dusky brute rolled to the ground.

Then Onion Bob put in a shot with a like result.

But the hungry monsters would not be frightened away, but devoured one another with a relish, that, to young Hale, was sickening.

"Oh, they're durned nigh famished, the critters," remarked the hunter, as he rammed home the charge in his gun. "The best way to feed 'em, is to kill 'em. So load up, my lad, an' blaze away."

As the hunter spoke, he leveled his rifle at an open-jawed monster, and, without any particular aim, blazed away. At the same moment Edward Hale put in a shot, and, almost simultaneously, two howling brutes keeled over in the throes of death.

"We mought as well let up on 'em," said the hunter, after a moment's silence, "fer we're only gittin' away 'ith our ammunition to no purpose. Drat me, ef I ain't afraid we'll hev the red bucks down on us ef we continue this rumpus. S'pose we roll up, an' go to sleep."

This proposition struck Edward Hale as being very comical, and he laughed, as he replied:

"I've had all the sleep I shall get to-night, and as for roosting in a tree, I couldn't possibly do it."

"But ye kin sleep on the ground?" queried the hunter, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"Then let us git down. Look, thar's not a wolf tu be seen."

With a doubtful expression on his face, Edward Hale did as he was bid, and true enough, not a wolf could he see.

"Gone, every rascal of them," said he, looking toward the fire. "What could have frightened them away?"

"I don't know, I am sure," answered the trapper, in a voice that sounded very cold and strange. "I am 'fraid tho', mighty 'fraid——"

"Of what?" quickly interrupted the young man.

"Of Ingins!" was the reply. "The wolves left us very suddint, ye know, thet's suspicious."

"But the redskins—what have they to do with it?"

"Wolves don't like redskins very well, and redskins don't like wolves," was the odd reply, "tharfore the two don't kim together."

"And do you think the red fiends have discovered us?" questioned the young man with considerable alarm. "Have they taken the place of the wolves?"

The hunter's reply was emphatic.

"I think the red bucks are watching us from the ground," he said. "In my opinion we are done fer!"

Edward Hale was silent a moment, thinking, then he asked:

"Is there anything we can do?"

"Nothin' but stay whar we are," was the reply.

"Ef we could reach the ground——"

"But we can't if the redskins are watchin' us. The moment we attempt to descend, we'll get positive warning that it won't do. Really, I know not what to do in this emergency. Have you nothing to suggest?"

The hunter answered quietly, though in a voice full of determination:

"Thar's nothin' we kin do but tu roost yer uns' the

break of day. In two hours from now it will be light."

With this the hunter pulled his cap over his eyes and refused to say another word, while Edward Hale, with many gloomy forebodings pressing in on his mind, watched and waited for the coming of the morning's dawn.

An hour passed by. All was still, all was silent, not even a leaf rustled, and Edward began to think that they were surrounded by perils only imaginary.

But he was soon undeceived.

At the first appearance of light the report of a rifle rang out upon the air, and the men heard the whiz of a bullet a foot or two above their heads.

"A warnin'," said the trapper, quietly. "We'll hear some more of the same music pretty soon. 'Thar!"

Again a rifle cracked, and again a bullet whizzed over their heads, this time in such close proximity to the hunter's cap, that he involuntarily gave a start which caused him to lose his balance, and he fell headlong, rifle and all, to the ground.

At first the trapper thought that every bone in his body was broken, but this point he had but a moment to consider, for in less than no time three or four screaming redskins were upon him, pounding and hammering him into the ground.

The trapper turned and twisted, struggled hard to get away, but failing, at length he cried out:

"Heavings an' yearth! are ye goin' to murder me? Pile off, ye nasty brutes, an' let me up. I'll surrender, I will, by mighty. Git off, I say."

Satisfied that their prisoner would not attempt to get away, the redskins ceased pounding him, and rising, with more than brutal ferocity, pulled or rather hoisted him to his feet.

"Durn pretty cusses, ye are," growled the hunter, as he wiped the blood from his face. "What in thunder d'ye mean by treatin' a gentleman trapper 'ith so much rudeness?"

If Onion Bob expected a satisfactory answer to this, he was mistaken in the men with whom he had to deal. All they did was to laugh and yell, and punch him in the side and breast with their guns.

At length the seeming leader of the band got off this in tolerable English :

"Big white cuss tumble from tree, almost break his head. How like fall, eh?"

"I don't like it very much," replied the trapper in a voice anything but pleasant. "An' then tu hev a pack uv miserable skunks ready to massacre ye, ar another thing I can't appreciate. What are ye goin' tu do 'ith me, ole man? I am ready to travel. Come on."

The redskin grinned.

"Another feller in tree," he chuckled, as he peered through the branches. "Don't s'pose warrior going to leave him?"

Onion Bob's countenance fell. He had hoped the redskins would pass his young friend by.

"I thought maybe the devils didn't know he war thar," whispered the hunter. "Wal, let them take 'im."

Edward Hale saw at once that the best thing he could do, was to give himself up without delay, so he quickly came down from the tree, and allowed his hands to be bound behind him.

A few minates the redskins waited, then, driving their captives before them, they moved swiftly and silently away.

CHAPTER. V.

THE WOMAN OF SPECTRE ISLE.

THE village of the redskins was about fifteen miles from the wood in which Edward Hale and his trapper friend were taken prisoners, and to this village the whites were driven with all possible speed.

They reached their destination a little after midday, and were greeted by a noisy crowd of savages, who could not heap indignities enough on their defenceless captives.

At length Onion Bob was taken in tow by four or five stalwart rascals, who thrust him into a sort of rude hut, and chained him to the ground.

Then, returning, they seized Edward Hale, and soon he, too, was thrust into a dungeon-like arrangement, and bound securely to the floor.

The jail or dungeon in which Edward Hale was imprisoned, was divided into two wings or compartments, and the partition was of logs rudely hewn and put together.

The jail was also quite light and dry. The floor was of sand.

For several minutes after his captors had gone, the young man remained very quiet, thinking; then he thought he heard a sound that resembled very much the regular breathing of a person asleep.

But he could see nobody, and to investigate while in his present position was out of the question.

"I believe there is another prisoner here somewhere," whispered the young man, as he attempted to arise. "If I could reach the wall, I would soon find out who it is. Suppose I call out."

Suiting the action to the word, Edward exclaimed aloud :

"Who's there? Friend or foe, answer me. I am a prisoner."

The breathing stopped almost instantly, a moment of silence ensued, then a voice, low and sweet, inquired :

"Who are you? Am I dreaming, or did some one speak to me?"

"Some one spoke to you, I reckon," replied Hale, dryly. "It was I."

"And who are you?" inquired the voice, in the same low, sweet tones as before. "You are a man, I know, but your name——"

"Is Edward Hale," was the quick reply. "I am a prisoner, the same as yourself, I suppose. But tell me your name."

A full minute the silence was unbroken, then the voice said sweetly :

"It will do you no good to know my name. We shall never see each other."

"But I must know it; do not deny me."

There was a moment of silence, then the voice replied :

"My name is Marguret."

Edward Hale started as though a rifle-ball had hit him, and for full five minutes could not speak for the varied thoughts that filled his mind.

"And her name is Marguret," thought the young man, "the same name that Slashaway, the Fearless, so often repeated. The woman of Spectre Isle—Marguret, Marguret. I wonder if she plays the guitar, and sings."

He stilled his throbbing heart by an effort of his will, and asked:

"Your name is Marguret, you say. Now answer me this: Do you play the guitar, and do you sing?"

It was an odd question, but the woman answered it at once.

"I play the guitar," she said, "sometimes, and sometimes I sing."

Edward Hale, more perplexed than ever, closed his eyes, and began to think. It seemed to him that he had been holding converse with an apparition. He thought of the golden-haired woman of whom Saul Slashaway had spoken—the woman who had so singularly stood between the hunter and Sandy Jim.

"You mustn't think me a ghost," spoke up the girl, after a while; "I am only a young thing, and a captive, like yourself. You asked me if I play and sing. Why did you ask me that?"

The young man replied at once:

"Because I heard some one playing the guitar the other day, and somehow I thought, I thought——"

"What?"

"That the musician was yourself. I do not know, I really do not know. Tell me if I am right."

The woman spoke up with sudden earnestness.

"It was my guitar that you heard, and I was the player. I saw you, but you did not see me."

"Then you are the woman of Spectre Isle—you live there?"

"I live with Black Nathan, the Hermit of Spectre Isle. My name is Marguret."

"And your other name——"

"You shall not know; at least, not now. I do not know you."

Determined to find out all he could, Edward Hale continued:

"I heard you sing and play, and I saw Black Nathan, as you call him. It was he who saved my life."

"No, you are wrong."

"How?"

"But for me, Black Nathan would not have raised a finger in your behalf. By accident I discovered Sandy Jim's intentions, I entreated the Hermit to follow him and save your life which he did. What think you now?"

Edward Hale could but utter his thanks in broken words, for it seemed to him that he was dreaming a wild, mad dream.

"Strange, strange," he said to himself, at length. "I am not mad, I am not dreaming, still I scarcely know what I am about. I never heard a sweeter voice than Marguret's, I never felt my heart beat as it does now. If I could see her angel face, how happy I should be. I wonder if she is bound, as I am, to a rock. I will ask her."

He spoke to her tenderly, and asked her if she was bound, but though he repeated his question several times, not a word reached him in return.

Then he began to wonder what had become of her, whether or no he had said anything to offend her, and somehow his mind turned on angel visitants, and it occurred to him that maybe Marguret was one of them.

"Still she spoke to me," he said, trying to shake off the feeling of dread that was creeping over him. "Maybe she is sleeping. I'll call again."

He cried out louder than before, "Marguret, Marguret," but no one answered him, the adjoining room was still. Then he said to himself in a whisper:

"She is gone, Marguret, my angel, gone, gone."

Just then the clanging of a heavy oaken door, and the rapid tramping of feet reached his ear, and with this he thought he heard the rough voice of Onion Bob, the trapper, approaching from a point to the left of him, several yards away.

And he was right. Onion Bob was soon thrust unceremoniously into the dungeon adjoining the one in which Edward Hale was bound, and with his hands fastened behind him, his feet securely tied, he was left to himself.

But before many minutes had elapsed, he let his presence be known, by exclaiming, in his usual, bluff way :

"Thunder an' snakes! I don't like this arrangement one bit; the varmints hev tied my paws tighter'n lightnin', an' my hoofs I can't budge. I'll be smashed ef I kin do anythin' but roll aroun' like a chicken 'ith his head off. I wonder whar Edward is."

The young man lost no time in informing the hunter where he was.

"I am here, old boy," he said, loud enough for the hunter to hear him. "If you can come a little nearer, do so, for I want to talk to you."

The trapper rolled himself over and over, until he reached the partition, when he vociferated, while he pounded the logs with his head :

"Ye don't tell me thet ye are in thar, does ye, Edward? Why, gosh, I thought the red bucks had killed ye. My lightnin'! but I'm glad you're yer. How does ye feel?"

"Not much like crowing," replied Edward, dryly. "I should like to get out very well."

"And so should I," replied the hunter. "Do ye know what they're goin' tu do 'ith us—the red imps?"

"No, do you?"

"Yas; "I seed 'em pilin' brush, an' dry wood, an' chips over thar, an' I reckon, wal, I reckon——"

"That they're going to burn us alive, roast us?"

"That's what I've concluded."

There was silence a moment, when Edward Hale remarked :

"What time of day should you call it?"

"About four o'clock in the arternoon, I reckon," replied Onion Bob, without much consideration.

"And how much longer have we got to live?"

"Ef it's roastin' they intend tu guv us, we'll git it about midnight. Oh, they'll hev a roarin' time—the devils."

The young man thought a moment, evidently not

very greatly impressed with the hunter's laconic observations. He spoke at last.

"I don't like to die this dog's death," he said, "and shall not, if I can help it. How are you bound—tightly?"

"Tightly?" grunted the hunter, "I should say so. All I kin do is tu roll over an' over like a barrel. 'I'm up a stump,' as they say, completely."

Edward Hale made no reply, but began to work his hands back and forth, half believing he could free them in a short time by a succession of twists and pulls.

The hunter heard him at his work, and divining what he was about, urged him on by saying:

"Ye kin du it, my lad, I reckon, ef ye try hard enough, fer these cussed leather straps sometimes give like thunder. So pull an' twist, an' yank an' jerk, an' may the good Lord help ye."

The young man worked until he was tired, which was very soon, then he lay quiet a few moments, after which, the woman suddenly coming into his mind, he said:

"You and I are not the only prisoners, Onion Bob; there is a woman to keep us company."

"A woman!" echoed the trapper. "Whar is she, whar is she?"

The young man hesitated a moment, then replied:

"I do not know, I really do not know; I did not see her, I only heard her voice. She was in the room where you are; at least I thought so, I thought so."

"But don't ye know, ye leetle cuss? Whar was she, I say, whar was she?"

"She was in there, but she disappeared suddenly, and you took her place. You must have seen her, certainly."

"But I didn't, by a darn sight," answered the hunter, sharply. "Did ye learn her name, ye monkey?"

The young man winced under the hunter's sharp retorts, but controlling himself, he replied:

"Her name is Margaret, and she is a resident of Spectre Isle."

* For some reason Onion Bob was silent. Five minutes passed, then he spoke, but what he said was to himself.

"Saul Slashaway, poor devil, he has more trouble nor any one else. Ef I war he, I'd go crazy, too—crazy as a bug. I hope the redskins won't kill her fer Slashaway's sake. He thinks a heap o' her, he does, o' Margaret, an' I don't wonder at it, fer she's a fine lass, a mighty fine lass."

The hunter ceased muttering, and for some minutes buried himself in silent thought.

He was aroused at length by Edward calling out excitedly :

"I'm free, old man, I'm free ; that is, my hands are free, and I'll soon loosen my feet, then I'll come to you. Glory, glory, glory."

The young man was as good as his word, for his feet were soon untied, and he was on his way to the assistance of Onion Bob.

But here arose an obstacle that for a moment appeared unsurmountable, and the obstacle in question was the log partition.

Edward examined it, but at first could see no way of getting through it, and his heart began to fail him, when Onion Bob suggested :

"Ef ye can't git over, maybe ye kin crawl under; the floor is uv sand, ye know. Begin to dig an' scratch like the devil, my lad, an' I'll wager my hat ye'll succeed."

The suggestion of the hunter was a good one, and the young man lost no time in useless argument, but began to work with a will.

After digging in the sand a while, he whispered, just loud enough for Onion Bob to hear :

"I am doing bravely, old fellow, bravely. I'll soon be through."

"It was a pretty tight squeeze, but Edward Hale, not be defeated, got right down to business, and soon

his lithe, slender form pushed into the light of the room where Onion Bob was bound.

The old hunter was delighted at the success of his old friend, and when the latter untied his hands and feet, and assisted him to arise, he exclaimed with energy:

"Ye are a bully boy, Ed'urd, an' worth a dozen common fellers. Gosh o' mighty! yer right up an' comin'."

The young man acknowledged the hunter's compliments with a smile, but he quickly changed the subject, by saying:

"So far so good, but what are we to do next? The redskins may come in at any moment, then what would become of us? We must do something at once, what shall it be?"

Before replying, the hunter gave the room a careful examination.

"I don't see any way fer us to git out," he said, "thet is, at present. We mought burst a hole in the roof, but we can't do it now, the red bucks' ud see us."

"But to-night we can, I reckon," quickly rejoined the young man, "and it will soon be dark. But should the redskins visit us before then, what are we to do?"

The hunter picked up from the floor a couple of stones weighing about a pound each, and giving one of them to Edward, he said, while his eyes glittered:

"Ef they come, the red imps, don't stop to think, knock 'em down, brain 'em, then run for yer life tu the woods, anywhar. The red murderers can't more than kill ye, an' ef ye give in, they'll kill ye sure."

But fortunately the redskins did not trouble them, and it was dark almost before they knew it.

"I believe a storm is brewing, I hear it thunder," whispered young Hale, as he crouched down in one corner of the room. "Anyhow, it is going to be very dark."

"The darker it is the better fer us," granted the

trapper, as he groped around the room, "and ef it thunders good and strong, I'll be satisfied."

Edward Hale was about to reply, when at this moment the heavy, oaken door swung open with a clang, and the black figure of an Indian warrior stood confronting the captives.

In one hand the savage held a brand of fire, in the other, a piece of meat of about two pounds in weight, which he thrust forward with a grunt.

"Won't kill white cusses to-night, kill to-morrow," snarled the painted imp, as he offered the meat to Onion Bob. "Paleface devils burn like prairie grass. How like to burn, eh?"

For some cause or other the heavy, oaken door at this moment swung to, and as the savage turned as if to open it, the hunter, with the nimbleness of a panther, sprang upon him, and grasping him by the throat so that he could not scream, bore him heavily to the ground, then quick as a flash, he pulled a long knife from the redskin's belt, and with one powerrul stroke ended the monster's life.

Then he said, as he grasped young Hale by the shoulder:

"The time has come, my lad, fer pluck an' fight. Thar are at least a dozen red bucks guardin' this shebang, an' what we're goin' to du, is to bust right through 'em. So gather a rock, my innocence, an' foller me."

Fear to delay lest the guards should suspicion that all was not right, Onion Bob quickly opened the door, and closely followed by Edward Hale, pushed boldly past the growling sentinels, who at first did not know them from their dusky friends.

But they soon discovered their mistake, and with blood-curdling yells, started in pursuit.

And then ensued a very lively race, which, but for the darkness, would have resulted in favor of the redskins.

As it was, one of the whites, Edward Hale, was retaken, but not by the rascals in pursuit.

The way of it was this: As Edward and Onion Bob

were bounding along, they became separated, and in the darkness, took almost opposite directions, and the first that Edward Hale knew, he ran plump into something, which at first he thought was a tree, but which he soon discovered was a redskin.

But he made this discovery too late, for the redskin hurled him to the ground in a twinkling, and being a very powerful savage, held him down, while he howled lustily for help.

And help appeared in about ten seconds, in the shape of a score of dusky brutes who soon jerked the young man to his feet, and as they drove him along, kicked and pounded him in the most shameful manner.

So in ten minutes from the time he escaped from the jail, he went back to it, bruised and bleeding, and thinking, and not without reason, that he would never come out alive.

As for Onion Bob, he out-distanced his pursuers, and escaped to the woods.

"The old trapper will help me if he can," said the young man to himself, as the redskins left him, bound to the floor of the jail. "I am afraid, though, very much afraid it's all up with me."

An hour passed. It was very dark, and the night was creeping on. Still the savages did not go to their wigwams, but kept up a continual howl outside the jail.

"What do they mean, the rascals?" questioned Edward Hale, at length. "It cannot be that they intend to torture me to-night. Still I hear the crackling of flames, and the smell of burning wood comes to me. Merciful Heavens! my flesh fairly creeps. Hark! I hear them coming. God help me, I am lost!"

Howling, screaming, yelling, and shouting, half a score of blood-thirsty knaves suddenly made a rush for the prison-house, and bursting down the door, seized young Hale, and with more than brutal ferocity dragged him to the stake of torture. Then they began to dance around him, scream their horrid music in his ears, thrust burning brands into his face, kick and

pound him, until, goaded to desperation, he cried out for them to kill him at once, and so end his misery.

But this the savage brutes did not intend to do; they preferred rather to murder him by degrees, and with this purpose in view bound him to a fire-charred stake, and began to heap brush-wood and dry leaves around him; then firing the pile, they shrieked; yelled, and danced about the slowly creeping flames like so many demons.

It was a horrible moment for young Hale; he fully realized his situation, and as the hissing, crackling fire approached him nearer and nearer, writhing, twining, squirming, he set his teeth firmly together, as if determined to die without a murmur.

But the redskins were equally determined that he should show his agony; they renewed the tortures, kicked, and struck him, and to make the horror more intense, blistered his face, hands, and arms with burning brands.

His agony was frightful. He felt as if he would instantly expire. Every fibre of his frame shuddered, and he knew that he was rapidly sinking into unconsciousness.

Still the fire raged, blistered, and burned; the skin was beginning to crumble away, shriveling up like parchment, and gaping cracks appeared in the flesh, from which blood spurted forth, and hissed upon the glowing coals.

This was more than human nature could endure.

The young man fainted.

CHAPTER VI.

TO THE RESCUE.

TH moment Edward Hale's consciousness left him, and he sank, as it were, a helpless lump into the fire, the Indians, satisfied with the tortures, kicked aside the brands, and cutting the cords with which he was bound, carried him to the nearest wigwam, and there tried every means in their power to bring him to.

In a short time they succeeded, and the young man opened his eyes and talked aloud, and so vividly did the horrible past come to him, that he shuddered involuntarily.

"They almost roasted me, the devils, and I wonder very much why they saved me," the young man said. "I am horribly burned." Then turning to an old, weather-beaten hag, who seemed to be the only person in the room, he asked : "Who are you?"

The old squaw looked up with a wicked scowl, and said.

"My name is Sleeping Wave. I am almost a devil. Don't ye believe it? Then try to get away, and see."

"And did you dress my burns?" questioned the young man, as he pressed his hand to his face.

The old hag answered at once.

"I did; I rubbed some ointment on them; the

braves thought you would die; I said no, I'd make you live. I wanted you to live, for I wanted to see you burn again. Next time no one will help you—burn to a crisp."

Edward shuddered, for it now occurred to him why the red fiends had saved his life. He was to be tortured at the stake a second time—he was to be burned alive.

The thought was a horrible one; too horrible to be long entertained, and Edward Hale wrestled with it until his heart fluttered wildly, and he groaned aloud. Then he spoke.

"It was no kindness in you, then, to save my life," he said; "I wish you had let me die. I was strong, then, now I am weak. I am a coward. Heavens! how the thought makes me shudder."

The old witch laughed a horrible laugh, and her wild, vindictive merriment, so out of place, so terrible, seemed to Edward Hale a species of devilish mockery.

"Ye don't want to die, then—afraid, are ye?" sneered the old hag, approaching so near the young man that her breath touched his face. "Just like all the rest—afraid of death. I know the palefaces well; I've lived among them; they are cowards."

The old witch spoke such good English, that Edward was not surprised when she informed him that she had spent several years among the whites.

"And did they ever treat you ill—the whites?" he asked, a singular thought at that instant coming into his mind, "did they try to burn you at the stake?"

The old hag scowled, and a bitter laugh escaped her.

"The paleface are dogs," she snarled, "and I hate them. Look at this scar and ask me if they tried to kill me. Dog! devil! wretch, look!"

She bent her neck, and Edward saw thereon a scar extending half way round—an ugly wound it must have been, and the young man lost no time in asking her how she got it.

"He almost killed me, the white devil, tried to cut

my throat," replied the squaw, and her eyes glittered. "Shall I tell you how it happened?"

"Yes, tell me all about it," replied the young man, impatiently. "Your face startles me, it looks so familiar. Have I not seen you before to-night, somewhere? I think I have. But let me have your story, now, at once. What! you think I can tell it better? Well, then, listen, for here it is."

"About seven years ago, as near as I can remember," began Edward, "I was visiting friends in a large western city, and while there, had occasion to render assistance to an old Indian woman, who was selling bead trinkets and so forth, on the streets. The way of it was this: It was near nightfall, and the old woman was on her way to her lodging-house, when she was met by three or four drunken scoundrels, who attempted to possess themselves of the articles in her basket, without paying for them. Of course the old woman resisted, and a scuffle ensued in which the squaw was roughly handled, she cried, 'Murder! murder!' then something in the Indian tongue; and I, who happened to be near at that time, ran to her assistance. And I was just in time. One of the cowardly rascals held a knife in his hand, and I noticed that it was covered with blood, and when I rushed up, he was about to strike a second time, which no doubt would have ended her existence. But I was too quick for him. Before his knife could descend, my cane, which was a heavy one, came down on his head with such force, that his knife flew out of his hand, and he himself fell sprawling to the ground. What happened next, you know as well as I, for you are the old Indian woman whose life I saved."

Sleeping Wave, the old Indian witch, heard the young man through without a word, but when he turned on her to verify the truthfulness of his story, she said:

"The young paleface speaks the truth. I am the old Indian woman whose life was saved by the white boy several years ago. When they brought you in—"

the braves—I knew I had seen you before. I thought, I studied, I wondered, then your face came to me, and I was satisfied. You saved my life; now what shall I do for you? Sleeping Wave never forgets a kindness."

Edward Hale did not answer for some minutes; he was revolving in his mind how he should proceed with the old witch, for, if it was her purpose to befriend him, he wanted to be sure of everything beforehand.

"I saved your life, you say," he began at last, "now what should you do for me—save mine, of course. I am in a tight box, am doomed to a horrible death, am friendless, alone, only you can save me. I helped you when you needed it, now help me."

The dark, scowling face of the old hag bent over the young man, and her eyes glittered savagely, as she replied:

"The paleface is a coward, he is afraid to die, he wants Sleeping Wave to save his life. Sleeping Wave is a squaw."

"She is a woman," returned the young man, "and the paleface boy saved her life, that is enough—he will die."

The old squaw paced the room back and forth several times, then stopping by the side of the young man, she bent her head, and said in a voice firm, but scarcely audible:

"Do not fear, Sleeping Wave will see that the young man escapes. Bloody Knife is a great warrior, and would kill the old squaw, if he knew what is in her heart. There is plenty of time, the braves are satisfied, they say you shall live a week, then die. I say you shall live longer, and I speak the truth. But beware what you say, what you think, what you dream—Sleeping Wave is a devil, and if you betray her, you die the death of a dog. Beware!"

Edward Hale had no disposition to betray the old witch; in fact, all he cared for was to escape, so he answered her unhesitatingly.

"Do not fear that I shall do anything to betray

you. All I ask of you is to give me a little lift in the direction of freedom. You are kind, very kind, to help me. I thank you."

The old hag said nothing, but seating herself in one corner of the room, doubled herself up in a sort of heap, and apparently went to sleep.

But she was only dozing, as Edward soon discovered, for the moment he would move or make a noise in any way, her eyes were on the alert, and her ears ready to take in every sound.

In this way matters continued until morning, when the old hag aroused herself and began to look to the wants of the young paleface captive, who certainly needed her assistance, for his burns were hurting him considerable, and he was very sore and lame.

"No sleep, no rest, no nothing," said the old woman, as she bent over him. "Next time sleep better, then get well."

Pouring some ointment from a pouch, the old hag dressed the young man's burns, and soon he felt easier, besides being very thankful for her kindness. He would now get well.

The old woman built a fire, baked a sort of bread, roasted a venison stake, and with a little herb tea, brought Edward his morning meal.

The young man was very hungry, and ate what was set before him with a relish, nor did he care very much when the old hag gave him a wicked scowl, for he fully believed that she would aid him to escape.

Time passed on. The sun came up full of beauty, and its welcome light stole into the wigwam, danced over the young man's face, toyed with his hair, and seemed to speak to him.

At length Sleeping Wave went out, and Edward rose partly to his feet, and looked around him, for to discover, if he could, how many red devils were guarding the building, was his intention.

But he could see nothing, hear nothing, but a noisy yelp of dogs, the cry of children, and an occasional whoop of some lusty warrior returning from the chase.

"They are going to let me rest awhile, I guess, the imps," said the young man, as he returned to his couch of furs. "However, that I am closely guarded is plain enough, for the redskins know their business too well to give me a single chance of escape. I am afraid that Sleeping Wave cannot help me, very much afraid."

The old squaw returned after a short absence, and Edward saw at once that her mind was ill at ease; something had gone wrong; she was sullen, morose, and little inclined to speak.

Determined to learn what had induced this change, Edward asked:

"Are you ill, or have you seen something to disturb you? What are the warriors about this morning?"

The old witch looked up with a frown, and answered between her teeth:

"The captive girl must die!"

The young man sprang up with a sudden bound, and for a moment his heart fluttered, his eyes looked wildly around him, and it seemed to him that he could see the fair girl-captive—Marguret, he supposed—suffering all the horrors through which he himself had passed, then falling a charred and sightless lump to the ground. Then he tried to speak, but he could not he could only groan.

"What ails ye, lad?" said the old squaw, at length "Is the white girl anything to you?"

"More than any one can tell," replied Edward, with his eyes full on the old hag's face "She is young and beautiful, is she not?"

"She is young," answered the old witch, scowling, "and she may be beautiful—I don't know what beauty is. Anyway, she burns to-night. Bloody Knife has spoken; that is enough."

Edward was silent a moment, thinking. The first thrill of horror and surprise had passed, and he was now coolly calculating on the chances of his own escape, and wondering how he could be of service to

the beautiful girl-captive, in this her day of trial, wondering if he could not rescue her from her cruel captors, or in some way induce them to save her life.

"The redskins are very cruel to kill her, a girl, innocent and beautiful," said the young man, at length. "She has been with them several days; it seems strange that they should kill her now."

Edward hesitated, and look at the old hag, who answered him in a sort of fiendish satisfaction.

"The young braves make fools of themselves," she began, "they think the pale squaw beautiful, and they quarrel and fight, and kill one another just for her. Bloody Knife is wise, he loves to see peace among his warriors, and he knows how to get it—he will put the young girl to death."

"And you say she dies to-night?" put in Edward, still calculating on the chances of her escape, "she dies by fire to-night?"

"Bloody Knife says so, and he always speaks the truth," replied Sleeping Wave, with a bitter, unnatural laugh. "I wanted to kill her myself, but they wouldn't let me—the warriors—I wanted to tear her limb from limb, I hate her!"

"Then you have seen her, know how she looks, and can describe her. I know her, and still I do not know her. My eyes have never beheld her."

"Then why do ye whine so about her, ye devil?" yelled the witch. "What if she does burn, what is it to you?"

"A good deal, I love her."

The old hag laughed loud and long, she seemed to enjoy the young man's discomfiture, appeared to glory in his distress.

"Ye love her, do ye?" at length she sneered. "Maybe ye'd like to see her before she dies. Shall I bring her here?"

The young man's face flushed, his heart fluttered wildly, and hoping that the beautiful girl captive might be brought to him, he answered:

"I should like to see her very much. Cannot you take me to her?"

The old witch laughed mockingly, and there was a savage glitter in her eyes as she replied:

"The little paleface squaw must die. Sleeping Wave cannot save her—cannot even see her; she is guarded by the braves of Bloody Knife, and to-night she burns at the stake. Do ye wish to see her? Then come with me to-night and you shall see her as she writhes in the flames, shrieks, screams and yells; she will be lovely then, and her screams of agony will be as music in your ears."

She seemed to take especial delight—did this old she-devil—in depicting the agonies of a captive at the stake, and not till Edward shrieked out for her to cease her devilish jargon, did she stop talking of the coming horror.

"She's as blood-thirsty as the rest—the old heathen," muttered Edward, as the hag, with a savage growl, left the room. "I expect every minute to have her thrust a knife into me. I am not satisfied that she is my friend, that she is sincere in her promises of assistance. I distrust her, she is an Indian."

The young man was still a moment, listening; he thought he heard a scratching, scraping sound coming from the outside of the wigwam, and apparently against the logs near his head.

A moment he listened, the sounds were a great deal more distinct, a voice was whispering to him too low to be understood—it was only to attract his attention. He placed his ear to a chink in the wall and listened, while his heart fluttered as though it would burst its bounds.

"Who speaks to me?" he said at length, "the white or the red?"

The man on the outside whispered through the chink:

"It is I, Saul Slashaway, and I have come to save you. Are you bound?"

It seemed to Edward that a mighty weight had been lifted from him, and he replied, joyfully :

"I am not bound, I am badly injured. The redskins did it—attempted to burn me alive. Come in."

"Where is the old witch?"

"Gone—I don't know where. Are ye not afraid of the redskins?"

"No, I'm a redskin myself, just now. I killed a red buck and changed clothes with him, and painted my face—I'll pass, I reckon. But you shall see for yourself."

The hut of Sleeping Wave was not conspicuously situated, and as a consequence, Slashaway got into it unobserved, though, had the redskins seen him they would have suspicioned nothing, so cunningly was he disguised.

"I look pretty well, don't I?" said the old man, taking young Hale by the shoulder. "I'll pass, I reckon."

Edward looked sharply into the hunter's face, then surveyed his eccentric costume, after which he exclaimed :

"A perfect Indian! I wouldn't have known you had you not told me your name. How did you find me out? who guided you?"

"I needed no guide," replied the hunter. "I know every wigwam in the village, I am almost an Indian."

"But you left me in your cave; how did you know of my capture by the redskins?"

"Onion Bob told me."

"Then you have seen Onion Bob?"

"Yes; he is waiting for me now on the outskirts of the village; he was near you last evening when the red varmints had you at the stake; he told me all, and here I am to save you and—and—Marguret. Have you seen her, my Marguret, anywhere?"

With downcast eyes the young man answered :

"No, I have not, but her voice I heard; we were prisoners together. She spoke of you."

"What did she say?"

"She said she knew you, and—and—loved you. I wondered that she should say so."

The old man's voice quivered.

"Why shouldn't she love me?" he said, at length; "she is my daughter."

Edward had suspected as much, but now he knew for a certainty that Marguret was the daughter of Slashaway, the Fearless.

"She did not tell me her name—that is, only Marguret," said the young man, thoughtfully. "But now I know her name, and who she is; she is your daughter, and you love her."

"Better than my own life."

"And the Hermit of Spectre Isle—who is he?"

"A strange old negro, very kind, very good, and as true as steel to Marguret and I. The redskins call him the 'Black Wizard,' and, until now, have kept away from him, thinking him a spirit of evil. When Marguret got back—she goes to school, she does; I send her thar—I let her stay 'ith Black Nathan, for I thought she'd be safer there than 'ith me. But somehow the red bucks discovered her, and now she is a captive, and the Lord only knows what she has suffered."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESCAPE.

THE lantern brushed away the tears that gathered in his eyes, and to a remark of Edward's concerning Sandy Jim, went on :

"Ef you'd like to know how it happened, I'll tell you. Sandy Jim was my wife's brother. One day Marguret—that is, my wife—and Jim got into a dispute about me—Jim hated me—when what do you think he did? *He up and shot her dead!*

"Then he jumped the country, but I followed him, and tried to shoot him, but it wasn't for me to do. Every time I'd draw on him, a woman in white, a beautiful woman, Marguret, 'ud glide between us. I couldn't shoot her, so I couldn't shoot him. But now he is dead, thank God! and I've nothing to fear from him; still I am not yet out of trouble. Marguret, my daughter, is a captive in this village; for aught I know, she is doomed to die. I must save her. Can you tell me where she is?"

Edward lost no time in informing the old hunter all he knew concerning the captive girl.

Slashaway had not imagined the savages would deliberately torture his fair daughter at the stake, so when Edward informed him of the intentions of the redskins, it seemed to him that he should die of the very thought.

"Marguret dies to-night," he repeated. "It cannot be, it shall not be. I'll save her, or die myself. Merciful God! what shall I do? I cannot think of losing Marguret, and such a death, too, so horrible. At midnight, you say, young man? Well, we shall see, we shall see. Are your feet badly burned?"

"I can walk," said the young man, inquiringly. "Why do you ask?"

"Because you must get away from here to-day. There'll be a row to-night that'll make things hum."

"But I am safe; the redskins won't harm me. Sleeping Wave, the witch, is my friend; she owes me her life."

The hunter stepped toward the door, for at this moment he heard the tramp of feet approaching the house, but before he could get safely out, the old witch had her eye upon him, and her voice was ringing in his ears.

"Who are you?" she screamed. "Fool, wretch, scoundrel! what do you mean by sneaking into my house? A paleface dog dressed up as a redskin. Ha, ha! you deceive no one; you are a fool!"

At first the hunter did not know what to do; should he answer the old witch, or should he go on, and let Edward explain away his presence in the house as best he could? He decided almost instantly, and left the old woman without a word.

Sleeping Wave watched him until he was out of sight, then she went into the house, and her eyes glittered savagely, as she said:

"Ye are a traitor, ye devil! A white rascal just left my house. What war he doing in here?"

"Nothing; he is my friend."

"Your friend," repeated the squaw, sneeringly; "so am I your friend, yet I would cut your heart out at the slightest word. Listen, now. To-morrow I'll set ye free, then we'll be even. You saved my life, now I'll save yours."

Edward was silent. The old hag went about her work and said nothing. And so the day wore on.

At length evening came, and the village which had all day been very quiet, began to ring with the shouts, whoops, and howls of savage warriors, and soon Edward was convinced that preparations were being made for a grand war-dance, at the end of which, Maguret, no doubt, would be brought forth to meet her doom.

In a fever of excitement the young man watched and waited. The hours went by. He could hear the savages as they ran wildly about, howling and screaming like so many demons, and as he thought of Maguret and the horrible death that awaited her, he groaned aloud.

After a while Sleeping Wave, the old witch, caught the excitement, and without a thought of Edward rushed out, and soon she too, was as busy as the rest in preparing for the coming horror.

At length Edward could stand it no longer. He determined to make his egress from the wigwam, and if necessary, die by the side of the suffering girl.

With this purpose in view he rose to his feet, and notwithstanding his burns pained him severely, hobbled to the door.

Then he bethought himself of a weapon, and halting, looked around the room to see what he could find that would aid him in case of emergency.

A small hatchet proved to be the only weapon in the room, and this he appropriated.

Quietly, cautiously, he crawled out of the wigwam, and took his way toward a clump of bushes just back of the council-house, and a little way off from a huge fire, around which the redskins were congregated.

He reached the bushes in safety, he secreted himself.

he could see the redskins, but the redskins could not see him—he was comparatively safe. So he watched and waited.

An hour passed by. The savages were still dancing around the fire, they were wild with excitement—a horde of ferocious, drunken brutes.

At length the hour of midnight drew near, and at once a score of howling, besotted devils, made a rush for the council-house, and before half a minute had passed, Marguret was at the stake of torture.

From his position in the bushes Edward saw all that was passing, and as he thought how weak he was, how little he could do to help the beautiful captive, he groaned aloud.

"I have only a hatchet," he said. "I can do nothing. God help her! There, she screams, they are putting her into the flames!"

With an infuriated yell, two monster redskins suddenly seized the fainting girl, and lifting her above their heads, made a rush for the burning pile as if to throw her in.

As the horror struck him, Edward held his breath, but to his surprise the two savages, with the girl still in their arms, leaped the fire and bounded into the darkness which lay beyond.

At first the savages were stupefied, they knew not what to think, but directly the truth dawned upon them. The two stalwart men who had carried the girl away were palefaces in disguise. But who they were, their names, the savages did not know.

But it was all the same to Slashaway and Onion Bob.

They were the men!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PURSUIT.

AS soon as the redskins discovered the deception, their rage knew no bounds, and as they started in pursuit, such a howling, cursing, and screaming, Edward nor the hunters never heard before.

For some minutes Margaret was unconscious. Slashaway and Onion Bob carried her a short distance into the darkness, then laid her on the ground, where she quickly revived.

But even then she did not know where she was nor what had happened, she only knew that some one was bending over her, and speaking kindly to her—a friend.

Pretty soon the men lifted her up and carried her to where their horses were concealed, then mounting them—Margaret in front of Slashaway, the Fearless—the little party rode swiftly and silently away.

It was the object of the hunters to make their way straight to the habitation of Black Nathan, which they could reach, they thought, by hard riding, in about three hours.

And the time was well calculated. In about an hour the moon appeared, the clouds drifted away, and

in two hours more the little party of fugitives had reached their destination.

But do not think that all this time the redskins were idle. On the contrary, they had exerted their utmost to overtake the whites, and when morning came, they thought they almost as good as had them in their power.

As the reader knows, the home of Black Nathan was in the centre of a lake, on an island called Spectre Isle. It was a small island, and from the shore looked more like a huge boulder or a rocky ledge than anything else.

The house was a cellar-like arrangement, walled in with stone. It was large, roomy, and very light and dry, and fitted up in a manner as comfortable as one could wish. It also commanded a good view of the lake in every direction.

As soon as the fugitives had reached the island, and were admitted into the Hermit's house, a conference was held as to what should next be done.

It was decided at last to stick to the house, and let the savages take them if they could.

"We kin lick 'em, I reckon, two hundred uv 'em," exclaimed Onion Bob, turning to Slashaway for an approving word. "What think ye, old un?"

"We'll do the best we can for 'em," replied Slashaway, dryly. "For myself I'd as soon fight as not, but Marguret——"

"Don't worry about me, father," interrupted the fair girl. "I am used to bloodshed, and can stand most anything now. But you spoke of a young man named Edward—where is he?"

The old hunter's face darkened, but the cloud passed away in an instant, and he replied:

"He is among the redskins, poor boy. However, I think he is safe. Sleeping Wave will take care of him."

"And who is Sleeping Wave?" asked Marguret.

"An old Indian witch," replied her father. "Edward once saved her life; she will repay him."

At this point Onion Bob changed the subject by saying :

"I heerd a howl jist then, Slashaway, a howl, an' I reckon it war a painted varmint. Ye see it's daylight, an' the red scalawags 'ill be 'round pretty soon, thicker'n thunder."

The old hunter went to the door and looked out over the water. At first he could see nothing but the black, jungle-like wood bordering the lake; a second look, however, and as many as twenty savage warriors appeared before him on the shore.

"A savage crowd," said Black Nathan, who, at that moment, was looking over the hunter's shoulder. "It would do me good to kill them one by one; but," he added, "they may kill us!"

The hunter did not reply: he was thinking whether there was a possibility of keeping the redskins from landing on the island. "Ef we can keep them from landing," he said, "we may tire 'em out; "but let them once get a foothold, and the blood 'ill flow like water—there'll be a thunderin' fight."

The men lost no time in making preparations for the coming struggle. Everything that would aid the redskins to gain a landing was removed, and as many obstacles as possible were thrown in their way.

Full of fight, and knowing that they were powerful in numbers, while the whites were but few, the blood-thirsty savages launched their boats, two in number, and pushed boldly for the island, expecting, no doubt, to effect a landing unopposed.

But in this they were mistaken.

The whites had their eyes upon them, and concealed, as they were, behind rocks, had every opportunity of doing some bloody work.

And they did it. The savages, confident of success, pushed boldly forward, and, as they soon discovered, right into the jaws of death.

As they neared the shore, Slashaway and Onion Bob took deliberate aim at the apparent leaders of

the savage crowd, and sent two rifle-balls crashing into their skulls.

The painted monsters dropped like lead into the water, and the rest, seeing their leaders fall, with howls of disappointment, rage, and fright, whirled their boats around, and beat a precipitate retreat.

Once out of range they halted, and began to wrangle among themselves, howling, screeching, yelling, then they would shake their guns menacingly at the men on the island, while at the same time they cursed and swore with all their strength.

But the hunters paid no attention to their jeers and fiendish threats, they charged their guns, and waited quietly for the rascals to return.

But the redskins had no intention of making any more reckless advances, the murderous skill of the whites had taught them that a little prudence in the way they managed things would not be out of place.

"They won't disturb us just at present," remarked Slashaway, as the savages moved toward the shore. "I wouldn't wonder if we didn't see 'em agin to-day, but to-night we'll catch it."

And the hunter was not far from right. The savages stationed themselves on the shore in plain view of the whites, and for several hours not an aggressive move was made by either party.

And so the day wore on, night came at last, the moon and stars took their places in the sky, and for a time silence reigned supreme.

At length Slashaway, whose watchfulness never left him, discerned a movement among the redskins that aroused his suspicions.

About a dozen painted rascals were seen to cross the lake and move up within a short distance of the island, while the remaining savages drifted to about the same distance on the opposite side.

But the movement, though good enough, was plain enough to the hunters.

Evidently it was the intention of the redskins to try to effect a landing at two distinct points, which, know-

ing the strength of the fugitives, they thought they could accomplish with ease.

With courage that never flinched, firm, resolute, determined, the two hunters assisted by Black Nathan, constructed a rude breastwork near the house, and stationing themselves so as to obtain a good view of the water on either side of them, watched and waited the approach of their savage foes.

It was a moment of extreme peril to the hunters. They had little hopes of driving the redskins back.

"We'll do the best we kin, fellers," said Onion Bob, "but ten chances to one they'll drive us inter the house. What do ye conclude, Slashaway?"

The hunter answered by pointing his rifle at the redskins, and nodding significantly.

Onion Bob and Black Nathan understood him, and cast their eyes upon the savages, whom they saw were now within easy rifle range.

"Shall we let drive at 'em?" whispered the negro, as he cocked his rifle. "I'm anxious to spill a little blood."

"An' so am I," rejoined Onion Bob.

"Then go in!" exclaimed Slashaway, bringing his rifle to a dead aim on one of the redskins. "One, two, three, fire!"

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

The men selected their game, and almost simultaneously three reports, keen and startling, rang out on the air, and three dusky savages, with agonizing screams, threw up their hands, and fell headlong into the water.

At first the savages, seeing their comrades fall, turned as if to retreat, but their hesitation was but momentary; with howls, yells, and screams, they pushed for the shore, while at the same time they sent a volley of rifle balls in among the rocks which concealed our friends.

A hand-to-hand conflict was imminent. The men did not have time to reload their guns, but fortunately, Slashaway carried a revolver, Onion Bob a keen-edged hatchet, and the negro a long, glittering knife.

Yelling, screaming, howling, shouting, the savages advanced; they were determined, they were full of fight, and ready for any deed of blood however atrocious.

The men waited a moment to let the redskins get a little nearer, then springing to their feet, with loud and startling yells, rushed upon them just as they were leaving their boats.

Onion Bob and the negro made a rush for the boat

nearest the shore, while Slashaway started for the other, and he used his revolver with terrible effect. Six shots in quick succession fell on the savages, sending four of them to their long homes, and wounding a fifth. The others replied with their rifles, then, turning with wild yells of rage and disappointment, rowed rapidly away.

But it was different with Black Nathan and Onion Bob. They met the redskins just as they were leaving their boat, and waiting not a moment, pitched into them with all the fury they could command.

Then a terrible hand-to-hand conflict ensued.

Whirling his hatchet above his head, the hunter struck right and left, and, for a moment, the way the blood flowed, the brains scattered, it seemed that he would vanquish them alone.

But the savages were resolute, and with tomahawk and scalping-knife, pressed around the men, bowling like demons let loose.

Black Nathan opened his part of the fight by plunging his long-bladed knife into a redskin's breast; then clubbing his rifle, he gave a mad whoop, and rushed into the thickest of the fight, where he dealt out vengeance right and left.

Pretty soon a blow from a tomahawk felled him to the earth. Then the whole savage crowd turned on Onion Bob, and but for the sudden arrival of Slashaway on the scene, would have killed him, and torn him limb from limb.

The old hunter came up with a rush, and seizing a tomahawk from the hands of a fallen redskin, knocked two savage monsters to the ground at a single blow. Then, seeing that defeat was certain, he cried out:

"Boys, run for your lives! to the house! to the house!"

The men obeyed, Black Nathan bringing up the rear, and just as the house was reached, Margaret swung open the door, and the tired and blood-stained men rushed within.

Not ten seconds behind, the savages thundered up,

but the door was fastened, barricaded from within, and for a time the fugitives were safe.

The men were all more or less injured. Slashaway was badly wounded in the arm, Onion Bob's face was covered with blood, while Black Nathan received a concussion on the head that almost killed him.

Just how many redskins were killed the hunters could not tell; probably a dozen, maybe more; anyhow, not enough to frighten the rest away.

"They fought like devils, the redskins," said Slashaway, as Margaret bandaged his wounded arm. "But the worst is to come. How are we to get out o' this trap without being picked off like squirrels? We can do nothing *but sit still and starve!*"

"Which ain't my style," quickly rejoined Onion Bob, wiping the blood from his face. "I'm goin' ter fight!"

But as he said this he turned pale, and shaking his powder flask, which was empty, looked at Slashaway, and inquired:

"Ammunition—hev ye got any?"

The reply startled Onion Bob as he was never startled before. The hunter said:

"I left everything outside—my rifle, powder flask, and all! I have nothing, and Black Nathan is no better off. There isn't a charge of powder in the house!"

Onion Bob sank in one corner of the room perfectly helpless. In a second he muttered between his teeth:

"We're done fer, we're busted! Good-bye! The red bucks i'll gobble us up now fer sure!"

And there was reason enough for the hunter to think so.

The savages were howling around the house, clamoring over it, pulling at the stones, and trying every way to tear it down.

Then they tried to burst down the door, but it was of oak, and withstood the shock.

In this way they worked until near morning, when

they succeeded in making a hole in the roof of the house, large enough to admit the body of a man.

But none of the redskins cared to venture in, nor did they enter, but instead carried great quantities of smoking coals, which they scattered in as promiscuously as they could.

"Ef they can't kill us one way they can another," said Slashaway, as he saw what the redskins were about. "Mighty! the smoke is almost suffocating a'ready."

Howling, screaming, yelling, the painted devils worked like beavers; burning, smoking faggots without number were tossed in, and heaps of smouldering coals were showered down on the now frantic prisoners.

What could be done? They were dying by inches. Five minutes more and they would be suffocated. But to open the door would be instant death. The savages would shoot them down without mercy.

At length Marguret, who all along had said nothing, now spoke up.

"Let us burst down the door, and be killed at once," she said. "This is agony; I can stand it no longer."

Slashaway clasped his daughter to his bosom, and groaned aloud. Then he started up with a sudden exclamation, and cried out:

"Listen! I hear the cracking of rifles. The redskins are running away. We are saved!"

A chorus of yells, this time not of savages, but of whites, burst out upon the air, and breaking down the door, the men saw coming straight toward them a dozen stalwart fellows, headed by no less a personage than Edward Hale.

"Saved! saved!" cried the fugitives, in one voice. "Thank God! we are saved!"

The trappers, for such they proved to be, gathered around Marguret and the rest, and in their rough way joined with them in thanking God for their escape.

Then Edward Hale told his story.

"The old witch spirited me away," he said, "gave me a good horse, and started me in the right direction. Last evening I met these men, and I traveled with them awhile, when we run against a wounded redskin, who gave us intimation of what was going on. And didn't we come here in a hurry? I guess we did, and we got here none too soon. The painted brutes were doing their best to kill you; but it's over now, and you are safe."

With most of the trappers Onion Bob and Slashaway were acquainted, and for a time the questions and answers that passed between them were numerous, but the question that principally concerned Margaret and Edward was asked by the hunter, Onion Bob. It was this:

"Will ye help us git the gal an' the young feller to the highest settlement—will ye chaps go in fer to help us?"

And the trappers said they would.

And they did.

What happened next we can soon relate. The redskins did not think it to their advantage to attack so large a party, so our friends safely reached their destination.

On the way Margaret and Edward became very well acquainted, and a mutual attachment sprang up.

By the advice of Edward, Margaret was returned to school, where the young man visited her frequently, and in a year's time they were married.

SLASHAWAY, THE FEARLESS.

23

For a time Slashaway lived with them, but he soon tired of the restraints of civilization and went back to his traps and guns. As for Onion Bob and the negro, they live together on the island so well known to our readers as Spectre Isle, and three months out of every year, Slashaway, the Fearless, is with them, and defying the redskins, they hunt and fish at will.

And so we bid them adieu.

THE END.

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Albertus, Surnamed Magnus, from the Latinizing of his surname, which was Great, was a native of Suabia, and born in 1215. He was ardently desirous of acquiring knowledge, and studied with assiduity; but being of slow comprehension, his progress was not adequate to his expectations, and, therefore, in despair, he resolved to relinquish books, and bury himself in retirement. One night, however, he saw the vision of a beautiful woman, who accosted him, and inquired the cause of his grief. He replied that in spite of all his efforts to acquire information, he feared he should always remain ignorant. "Have you so little faith," replied the lady, "as to suppose that your prayers will not obtain what you cannot of yourself accomplish?" The young man prostrated himself at her feet, and she promised all that he desired, but added that as he preferred philosophy to theology, he should lose his faculties before his death. She then disappeared and the prediction was accomplished. Albertus became, unwillingly, Bishop of Ratisbon, but he relinquished the See within three years, and resided chiefly at Cologne, where he produced many wonderful works. It was said that he constructed an automaton which both walked and spoke, answered questions and solved problems submitted to it. Thomas Aquinas, who was the pupil of Albertus, was so alarmed on seeing this automaton, which he conceived to be the work of the devil, that he broke it to pieces and committed it to the flames. When William, Count of Holland, and King of the Romans, was at Cologne, Albertus invited him to a banquet, and promised that his table should be laid out in the middle of his garden, although it was then Winter, and severe weather. William accepted the invitation, and on arriving at the house of Albertus, was surprised to find the temperature of the air as mild as in summer, and the banquet laid out in an arbor formed of trees and shrubs covered with leaves and flowers, exhaling the most delicious odors, which filled the whole of the garden. Albertus was reputed a magician, but nevertheless, after his death, which occurred in 1292, in his seventy-seventh year he was canonized.

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